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The Goldilocks Zone of Integral Liberty: A Proposed Method of Differentiating Verifiable Free Will from Countervailing Illusions of Freedom

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“The basis of a democratic state is liberty; which, according to the common opinion of men, can only be enjoyed in such a state; this they affirm to be the great end of every democracy. One principle of liberty is for all to rule and be ruled in turn, and indeed democratic justice is the application of numerical not proportionate equality; whence it follows that the majority must be supreme, and that whatever the majority approve must be the end and the just. Every citizen, it is said, must have equality, and therefore in a democracy the poor have more power than the rich, because there are more of them, and the will of the majority is supreme. This, then, is one note of liberty which all democrats affirm to be the principle of their state. Another is that a man should live as he likes. This, they say, is the privilege of a freeman, since, on the other hand, not to live as a man likes is the mark of a slave. This is the second characteristic of democracy, whence has arisen the claim of men to be ruled by none, if possible, or, if this is impossible, to rule and be ruled in turns; and so it contributes to the freedom based upon equality.”

Aristotle, *Politics*, Book VI, Part II (trans. Benjamin Jowett)

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The objectives of this paper are to outline what “verifiable free will” might be, what it isn’t, and some of the criteria with which we can go about making assessments. Why would we want to do this? In part because of a seeming prevalence of confusion around individual and collective liberty among both popular sentiment and academic discourse, and a perceived need for evaluation metrics that can inform our thinking about this topic and, potentially, approaches to future research regarding individual sovereignty and free will in general, as well as the formation of new practices, policies and experimental pilots. Too often such discussion finds itself mired in ideological assumptions and philosophical syntax that have little basis in observable evidence, and consequently are closed to multidialectical analysis, exploration of revised conceptions, or incorporation of existing alternative perspectives and approaches. This is one reason I have chosen to paint “free will,” “freedom,” “liberty,” “autonomy” and “individual sovereignty” with the same brush, because all of these terms have been used or abused to a similar degree in course of various arguments over time, and all of them deserve to be liberated from lingering distortions.

Why the “Goldilocks Zone?” Because a thriving of liberty is dependent upon specific conditions; it is not a pre-existing state, but an evolutionary one. And the conditions that foster freedom are quite similar in many of their characteristics to the conditions that foster the evolution and sustaining of life itself, occupying a narrow field of parameters that, when they become either exaggerated or constrained, abruptly cancel out the possibility of progress and indeed threaten annihilation to liberty itself. The Goldilocks Zone analogy emphasizes the tenuousness of the proposition of authentic liberty, the necessity for our individual and collective conscious participation in the formulation and execution of free will, and the ease with which it can be lost. In previous work I have described this generative conditionality as an “optimal range of function” or “the fulcrum’s plane,”¹ without which any number of essential factors of human well-being are either improbable or impossible. As it turns out, authentic freedom is just one more essential factor that falls neatly into this qualitative and quantitative band of dependencies.

What is Free Will?

First we require a working definition for “verifiable free will,” one that allows us a modicum of flexibility and clarity in defining its key factors, as well as the possibility of empirical validation. Here is what I would propose:

Free will is a synthesis of the subjective felt experience of free will, the intersubjective social agreements that ensure it, the interobjective systems and conditions that facilitate self-determinant choices and activities, participatory mechanisms that support and moderate these factors in the most diffused and egalitarian ways, and objective metrics for all of these factors that continually assess their efficacy and contribute to an ongoing synthesis.

To better define the key factors of a synthesis of integral liberty:

1. *Subjective felt experience of free will* as individual sovereignty over choices from moment-to-moment, as well as regarding future plans, as observed in the energization and active expression of four primary drives (*to exist, to express, to affect, and to adapt*).
2. Ongoing, constantly renewed and reinforced *intersubjective social agreement* that individual sovereignty should be collectively supported and maximized, acknowledging that without such agreement and intent, individual sovereignty will inevitably be either compromised, interfered with, or entirely inaccessible. Further, there should be ongoing communal engagement and dialectic around this agreement and its characteristics; this is a dynamic rather than static process, and would need to be customized to unique variables at cultural and community levels.



3. *Interobjective systems, conditions and artifacts* that foster the felt experience of individual sovereignty and ongoing *intersubjective social agreement*.
Although still malleable and customizable, there would likely be little debate about these universal processes, and they would have cross-cultural value and representation as relatively static features and functions of society. Thus these become social objects, systems, artifacts and conditions that relate to each other and society in fixed ways, rather than via dialogical dynamics between individuals and groups.
4. *Participatory mechanisms with built-in accountability* for supporting, enriching, moderating and promoting all other factors in the most egalitarian, diffused and distributed fashion. These could include distributed, daily direct democracy; Open Source initiatives and petitions; regular community meetings and online forums; participatory economics; worker-owned cooperatives; community management of banks and land; as well as civic lotteries for citizen commissions and all levels of polycentric governance networks.
5. *Objective metrics* employed at frequent and regular intervals for all of these factors to assess their ongoing efficacy in generating the greatest authentic liberty, for the greatest number, for the greatest duration.

As all this builds to a conception of what I have christened *integral liberty*, so I should give credit where credit is due. Those familiar with Ken Wilber's AQAL proposals will recognize approximations of his four quadrants in the descriptions of these key factors. A Wilberian organization was not my deliberate aim when writing this paper; on the contrary, I was quite surprised to find all of the considerations I had ferreted out falling so neatly into the AQAL quadrants. But there it is – Wilber's proposals seem to work quite well in this instance, though how I have utilized them to organize information may not be what he might intend for this topic. Another caveat I would raise is that the boundaries of key factor



categories are rather fuzzy, tending to interweave or interject themselves into each other to such a degree that firm AQAL delineations become less helpful. But as overlapping, interdependent and interpenetrating semantic containers, they can still add clarity as placeholders for further discussion.

Subjective Felt Experience

Subjective felt experience of free will as individual sovereignty over choices from moment-to-moment, as well as regarding future plans, as observed in the energization and active expression of four primary drives (*to exist, to express, to affect, and to adapt*).

The first factor, *subjective felt experience of free will*, has a specific connotation in this context. To fully define and appreciate that experience would be a substantive undertaking in itself, but thankfully some viable approaches to conscious will have already been accomplished by others. Daniel M. Wegner's work explores the concept in detail and provides an excellent outline of the phenomenon. From Wegner's *The Illusion of Conscious Will* (2002): "Apparent mental causation suggests that the experience of consciously willing an act is merely a humble estimate of the causal efficacy of the person's thoughts in producing the action." (p. 336) In other words, conscious will is what appears to us, subjectively, as a causal relationship between what we conceive and intend, and what actually occurs. But Wegner clarifies that "people experience conscious will quite independently of any actual causal connection between their thoughts and their actions." (p. 64) He then provides a wealth of evidence to support the theory of apparent mental causation. This tentative relationship between what we perceive as our own agency and what actually occurs is an essential differentiation, because it points us to supportive social frameworks and environmental conditions *without which the subjective felt experience of free will would be that much more fallible and elusive*.

But what constitutes the subjective felt experience of "free" will? It would follow from Wegner's work that this would simply mean that we *perceive* our causal efficacy to be unconstrained; we both anticipate and routinely confirm that our individual agency is not systematically impeded by other forces or factors, and we can observe an ubiquity of the same conditions for others. As an inevitable feature

of existence, we of course recognize that there are natural/physical, societal/ethical, relational/moral and situational/conditional boundaries to our own agency – this is what every three-year-old must begin to learn – but we willingly adopt these constraints and obligations as a matter of our empathic, compassionate and prosocial integration with the rest of humanity. These are the reciprocal, mutually beneficial boundaries that allow free will to flourish for everyone in society – rather than a yoke imposed by forceful, coercive oppression – and we will discuss how these concepts are embedded in political obligation more thoroughly in a moment.

But what does this “free will” feel like? How can we recognize it? This is where four primary drives handily come in, as they can define the *interior* components of our will even as they describe its *exterior* expressions. As proposed in Integral Lifework, these drives include:

To exist. In a subjective sense, this constitutes our awareness of the self as an apparently independent consciousness, physical organism and force of will that experiences and interacts with the other consciousnesses, organisms and forces within its environment. As that awareness evolves, it will change in quality and scope, and its relationship to everything else will change as well. Ultimately, if we become aware of the essential Self – as a unitive, undifferentiated experience of All-Being – this will tend to obliterate previous egoic conceptions of individual identity. However, this does not mean that such previous conceptions and experiences are less important, or that they do not persist in some form throughout higher states. The point is that in all such progressions, *existence* is an a priori assessment of the condition we inhabit...even if we question the foundations of that existence (i.e. the nature of perceived reality) or regard our experiences as tenuous, compartmentalized, or incomplete.

So then, what does the “freedom to exist” look and feel like? Is it the freedom from existential threats? The freedom from persisting fears of such threats? To have some fundamental confidence that, when the sun rises tomorrow, we will awaken



to a new day in which our continued existence is assured? In this first component of liberty, all that is really required is the *subjective perception* that most conditions like these are true. There may be additional benefit in our existence-affirming judgment being rationally derived, but that may not be necessary; this is more a matter of personal belief. If I *believe* I am free to exist – free from immanent harm or annihilation – then perhaps this is enough, at least for this first factor of *subjective felt experience*.

To express. Speech, gestures, body language, laughter, creativity, artistry, communication, craft – all of these and more involve *expression*. Here again, do I *believe* that I have freedom to express myself in various ways? If I do, then perhaps that is sufficient. If I exercise my self-expression and nothing overtly antagonistic happens as a consequence, then I will perceive my self-expression as free and unfettered. It should be noted that this sense of expressive freedom is not really rewarded except intrinsically; like existence itself, the mere fact that I can express myself however I wish – as long as it does not interfere with the primary drives of others – is the primary benefit and privilege this freedom affords.

To effect. This component differs from the other three in that it evidences through influencing or altering other consciousnesses, organisms and forces within our environment. It is of course intimately tied to the other three, in that it acts as a mirror of our *existing, expressing and adapting*; it offers us proof that these conditions are real and confirms our self-efficacy. This is not insignificant, but it leads to the central conundrum of individual sovereignty: what are the boundaries of personal freedom? When must I voluntarily reign in my *effect* on others, so that their liberty is not impeded? And how can I best calculate such boundaries, especially if I am ignorant of the extent of some *effect* that I produce – if there are unintended consequences to my actions? This is something we will need to address, but for now we can at least posit that if there is *a certain degree of effect* that is observable from what I will to happen, then I can experience the feedback loop of this freedom and have it subjectively affirmed. Interestingly, there will also



be moments of magical thinking, where an individual perceives an *effect* that they believe is of their making, but which really isn't caused by them. Even this may contribute to the perception of free will. But for now, we can at least say that whenever we look upon what we have accomplished, and feel a sense of affirming satisfaction, it is the regularity and extent of this feeling that enriches and confirms our liberty to ourselves.

To adapt. Can I change and grow? Can I learn and apply my knowledge to new situations? Can I explore the boundaries of my volition, knowledge, self-expression and effects on my environment, so that I maximize my individual sovereignty and the subjective felt experience of liberty? Can I evolve, and observe real benefits of that evolution? If these opportunities are afforded me without arbitrary restrictions, then my ability to *adapt* is confirmed, and my freedom is complete. This is the final component of the subjective felt experience of free will because it relies on the other three components to define and generate itself, just as *adaptation* also facilitates those other three. As a small child learns how to safely thrive within its environment, it constantly collects knowledge and techniques to *adapt*, so that it can *exist*, *express* and *effect* to its heart's content within the dynamics of each new situation.

So this is what I would propose the *subjective felt experience of free will* looks and feels like. It should be noted that a persisting theme in human history has been the deliberate attempt, by those who have the greatest power and influence in society, to generate these felt experiences in those who are to be ruled. This is the nature of "bread and circuses" and the engineering of a distracting spectacle for the masses. For if I *believe* that I am free – if I experience even a close approximation of empowerment and liberty in *existing*, *expressing*, *effecting* and *adapting* – then I just might overlook any subtle constraints or interference that carefully boundarize my will. This is one way countervailing illusions of freedom are created and maintained.



Even in modern democracies we find this dynamic in play. In the U.S., for example, we are provided democracy as a pressure relief valve for collective aspirations and dissatisfactions; we vote, believing that who and what we vote for will accurately represent our desires and intentions as operationalized by our government. But then the legislation supported by the people is not enforced, the politicians who win elections do not follow through on their campaign promises, and the issues so hotly debated during those elections receive little more than lip service until the next election cycle. Meanwhile, those who can afford to lobby elected officials every day of the year, who can entice the rising stars of politics with opulent campaign war chests, and who either own most mass media themselves, or can pay for constant promotion of their agenda through that media, craft a constant quid-pro-quo in democratic government – so that government expresses their will rather than the electorate’s. Occasionally there is a victory for the people, and a sense that democratic will is being expressed and our primary drives satisfied – but we might call this “playing the freedom lottery,” in that the partial reinforcement is barely sufficient to keep the electorate coming back for more.

And of course the same is true in supposed “free market” economies, where vast monopolies control what is available for consumption while funding massive marketing campaigns to invent artificial demand, insuring which goods are perceived as most desirable. And while the introduction of enticing or disruptive new technologies and products may, for a time, create price-elastic demand, eventually price-elasticity settles into a predictable range as both production and engineered dependency rigidify. It is only because capitalist enterprises and economies are growth-dependent that resource scarcity even comes into play – as corporations continue to create artificial demand and spur consumption, the pressures on availability of cheap labor and raw materials are likewise artificially exaggerated. In such an environment, innovation is just a means of restarting the clock until a given industry arrives at a price-inelastic demand once more.



If that particular price-inelastic landscape isn't desirable or sustainable, innovation isn't the only method of upsetting the apple cart. At some point it might also become advantageous to, say, capitalize on a debt crisis, or an armed conflict, or a market failure, or terrorist threats, or any number of other mechanisms that can help reset the growth curve with some new flavor of scarcity or reshaped demand. And whether it is calamity or invention that is inspiring opportunity, it is corporations who mold that opportunity into market forces to serve their ends, under the tremendous pressures of the very expectations they create. In other words, the "freedom" of capitalist markets is as much of a countervailing illusion as U.S. democracy representing the will of the people.

I wanted to touch on these realities briefly, though they would require much more attention to fully develop. But my point is that the perception of how our four primary drives are fulfilled will influence how "free" we believe we are – and that this perception is equally important to both authentic, integral liberty and its counterfeits.

Are Conventional Conceptions of "Negative Liberty" Sufficient?

In a word, no. Both the conventional presentation of negative liberty and its representations in classical liberalism are not sufficient for the subjective felt experience of personal freedom – at least not for everyone in society, and that is our aim. In the common parlance of contemporary political discourse, negative liberty mainly represents a formal ideal of non-interference, and one which is too far abstracted from real-world conditions to result in the *actual* subjectively felt experience of unfettered individual agency. This is fairly easy to demonstrate. If I am left manacled in a prison cell, chained to a wall with no food or water, completely unable to alter my current situation, and with no prospect of relief, I am still free to think and say anything I like. I have absolute freedom of thought and speech, but I do not have freedom of movement, and eventually I will starve to death. In this



sense, then, I only have *partial and temporary* negative liberty. To remedy this partiality, I will need to be set free from prison, have my manacles removed, and have access to food and water. All right then, let's say I'm set free.

I now have freedom of movement. Unfortunately, in my current half-clothed, filthy, half-starved condition, I still do not have access to food and water, and because I am fresh out of prison, *I also don't have the supportive means to procure it*. I have no employment, no lodging, no property...nothing at all that I can trade for sustenance. And if I live in a society that advocates private ownership of most of the resources around me, then my lack of supportive means definitively results in *an inability for me to alter my condition*. My only recourse would be to either beg charity from my fellows, or steal what I need to survive. Some might argue that I could simply find employment and thereby earn my way out of deprivation, thus recovering my ability to exercise freedom, but such a proposition indicates a glaring lack of personal experience with abject poverty. Why? Because my current condition is desperate – I am weak from hunger and barely clothed, and even if I were to gain immediate employment, I certainly will not have the physical and mental energy or stamina to work hard enough or think clearly enough to succeed at any task for more than a short time. These conditions continue to indicate that I lack the supportive means to alter my situation, *even though no one is actively interfering with my freedom to pursue such means*. Thus a lack of basic supportive means equates interference with liberty, regardless of my abilities or intentions.

This is, I suspect, why proponents of “positive” liberty have had significant practical problems with classical liberal conceptions of negative liberty; it tends to remain *partial and temporary* even when some supportive circumstances are improved. In this example, I have freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of movement, freedom to advance my condition, and zero interference from anyone else to remedy my own plight. I have been afforded complete and unimpeded negative liberty by society. But I am not really free, because the socioeconomic conditions in which I find myself interfere with my fundamental opportunities to survive and



thrive; my physical and material deprivations effectively rob me of liberties available to others *who already have supportive means* (which, it should be noted, they may have earned themselves, or which may a gift of circumstance, social status, marriage, or family and friends). Thus without an equivalency of supportive means – in this case without equivalent access to food, clothing, shelter and employment – I will be unable to exercise freedoms available to everyone else, freedoms which those who may have obscured the fundamental nature of liberty will inevitably take for granted.

However – and this is a crucial point – the supportive means to maintain liberty are nearly always only granted to those who have reliable foundations for liberty, and (again in the real world) these foundations include more than simple physical health and basic material resources. To be truly equivalent, all people must have access to the same quality of education, the same ability to travel over distance, the same flexibility and availability of free time, the same assurance and quality of justice and collectively approved rule of law, the same quality of care for mental and physical health, and so on – such things clearly being *in addition* to the aforementioned freedom of thought, speech, movement and the minimum facilities of material and physical well-being. Without these foundations, aspirations to liberty are just desires without facility. In addition, for negative liberty to be effectively equivalent for all members of society, it must also be blind to cultural barriers created by social class, race, gender, age and indeed any stigmatizing characteristics that do not, in the actuality of a person's day-to-day achievements and demonstrated potential, alter their abilities or performance. In other words, all people must also have access to the same freedom from prejudice.

The stark reality of anyone's subjectively felt experience of individual freedom will be framed by all of these conditions; to ignore their significance is to misunderstand how liberty itself comes into being – how it is created and maintained by society, rather than magically endowed upon a lucky few who have access to plentiful resources, pursuing their intentions without the tremendous resistance and



competition experienced by the less fortunate. Misunderstanding this reality is a fundamental error of individualism, which views the world self-referentially, fixating over self-entitlement, self-reliance and the defense of egoic freedoms, without appreciating the relationships of that self to everyone and everything around it. By embracing a more interdependent perspective, we can give prudence to approaches that appreciate the dynamics of co-creative freedom, contextualizing the social self amid relationships with everyone else...and *everything* else (i.e. community, the environment, other polities, culture and history, and other levels of interaction not yet identified, etc.).

From the perspective of the poorest members of any market-based society, these foundations for liberty are often perceived as the perks of the affluent, as inaccessible as they are rare. From the perspective of the affluent members of that society, these foundations are frequently perceived as the natural consequences of one's focused effort and native intelligence. Both perspectives are flawed, because what is really at the heart of the disparity are societal expectations of private property and individual wealth accumulation in a commercial exchange economy, and the consequent capacity for individuals to transfer that property and wealth to whomever they choose – most often their own offspring, friends and peers, and members of like-minded affiliations. That is, to transfer the foundations of liberty to those of their choosing, resulting in the exclusion of those not chosen. I call this *the tyranny of private ownership*, and like all of the other conceptions discussed here, it too has also been collectively created and maintained by society.

In the case of modern State capitalism, we have a collective acceptance of a market-based economy – enabled by property laws, contracts and financial systems enforced by the State – in which assets may be accumulated without restraint, then fluidly translated into social advantage, political influence and legal power, also facilitated by the State. And while attempts to secure the foundations for liberty via the State (i.e. civil rights laws, socialized infrastructure and services, polices to counter discrimination, social welfare for the poor, democratic controls, etc.) have



had varying degrees of success, the amplification of supportive means that individual wealth accumulation and control over property affords has routinely either undermined or far exceeded these State-enforced efforts at equalization.

This is, in fact, how private ownership has become increasingly tyrannical, directly interfering with the liberty of anyone who does not have such accumulations of wealth or control over property. And as long as any society perpetuates such tyranny, the natural consequence will be that some individuals and their families will have ample foundations of liberty available to them, while the rest of society will not. As long as private property and individual wealth accumulation are central features of a given economy, that economy will inevitably tend towards feudalism – no matter how artfully disguised its feudalism may be in Constitutionally enshrined liberties – because of the corrosive force that concentrations of wealth inevitably produce.

Thus the formal concept of negative liberty must be contextualized in real-world experiences, experiences which point toward much broader, more egalitarian structures that support civil society, and a much more precise and multifaceted formula of intersubjective agreement, in order for freedom to exist at all. To clarify, I do not mean various levels of *ability* or *opportunity* to exercise freedom, *but the freedom itself*. In this sense I concur with G.A. Cohen's evisceration of these differentiations with respect to wealth in his lecture, *Freedom and Money* (2001), where he artfully describes how "poverty demonstrably implies liability to interference." As he writes:

"Consider those goods and services, be they privately or publicly provided, which are not provided without charge to all comers. Some of the public ones depend on special access rules (you won't get a state hospital bed if you are judged to be healthy, or a place in secondary school if you are forty years old). But the private ones, and many of the public ones, are inaccessible save through money: giving money is both necessary for getting them, and, indeed, sufficient for getting them, if



they are on sale. If you attempt access to them in the absence of money, then you will be prey to interference.”

I am simply extending this logic to include additional variables beyond wealth that have precisely the same impact on freedom – that is, as Cohen might phrase it, their “whole point...is to extinguish interference.” For the practical purposes of ensuring *actual* freedom that avoids *actual* domination, the ideal must be reconciled with the real. If my subjective experience is that my individual sovereignty is being wholly disrupted by conditions beyond my control – whether by the direct actions of others or a system in which the status quo indirectly oppresses me – then my subjective experience of unconstrained free will is effectively destroyed; I am dominated, enslaved and deprived of agency as a result of external factors. This may be difficult for proponents of traditional conceptions of negative liberty to accept or appreciate, especially if they are unable to see beyond their own privileges and status. But I think it long overdue for our society to take responsibility for the oppressive harm narrow conceptions of freedom ultimately impose on anyone who lacks appropriate foundations for liberty.

Now, does this mean that notions of “positive liberty” – that is, authorizing and enforcing conditions that allow everyone the same opportunity, means and ability to exercise free will – are somehow more comprehensive or correct? Not necessarily, because the aim of creating a level playing field can also impose constraints on unwilling parties, so that they subjectively feel coerced and oppressed. I think when advocates of positive liberty include interior freedoms, these are important considerations, and we will address them shortly. But the assumption that the power to self-actualize – the granting of the subjective experience of free will – should somehow be authoritatively enforced as an unqualified empowerment or entitlement is indeed a precarious, often paternalizing road, clearly having the potential to interfere with liberty. At the same time, if we focus only on negative liberty in terms of simplified conceptions of external interference, we are also likely



to neglect some of the more nuanced but persisting impedances to felt experiences of personal freedom.

Is there a way out of this seemingly polarizing maze? One pragmatic approach is, I suspect, to examine the concept of interference to a more exacting degree.

What Substantive Interference Actually Looks Like

Although generations have idealized Thoreau's pastoral solitude near Walden Pond, imagining an equally idyllic flavor of personal freedom and self-governance through his musings, his was not a life very many people are gifted the opportunity to live. That said, Thoreau's life and work – along with the ideas we have explored so far – hint at some of those nuanced but persisting interferences with individual sovereignty and liberty. First we should include Thoreau directly in our discussion by quoting him from "Life Without Principle" (1863):

"Perhaps I am more than usually jealous with respect to my freedom. I feel that my connection with and obligation to society are still very slight and transient. Those slight labors which afford me a livelihood, and by which it is allowed that I am to some extent serviceable to my contemporaries, are as yet commonly a pleasure to me, and I am not often reminded that they are a necessity. So far I am successful. But I foresee that if my wants should be much increased, the labor required to supply them would become a drudgery. If I should sell both my forenoons and afternoons to society, as most appear to do, I am sure that for me there would be nothing left worth living for. I trust that I shall never thus sell my birthright for a mess of pottage. I wish to suggest that a man may be very industrious, and yet not spend his time well. There is no more fatal blunderer than he who consumes the greater part of his life getting his living. All great enterprises are self-supporting. The poet, for instance, must sustain his body by his poetry, as a steam planing-mill feeds its boilers with the shavings it makes. You must get your living by loving. But as it is said of the merchants that ninety-seven in a hundred fail, so the life of men generally, tried by this standard, is a failure, and bankruptcy may be surely prophesied."



Thoreau goes on to say a great many things regarding freedom – that it should encompass political, moral and economic freedom, as well as the freedom of expressing ideas; he also implies that freedom from an overabundance of stale, dyspeptic and paltry ideas, and from idle amusement, are also desirable. In his social criticism, Thoreau consistently rejects a majority of societal, institutional and political expectations in favor of a richly developed individual interiority. It is that wealth of interior life that constitutes true freedom for him, along with ample time to pursue it. Perhaps most famously, in “Civil Disobedience” he makes a case for freedom of conscience to resist all unjust government, writing, “Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn.” Here again the self-determination of the individual becomes preeminent, and any expectation of the State is deemed unjust unless Thoreau has personally conceded it. In *Walden*, just to add a finer point, Thoreau also makes clear that freedom from owning furniture is also extremely important to him.

To follow Thoreau’s reasoning to its logical conclusion, we could propose that many elements of modernity consistently interrupt our individual freedoms. These include things like population density fueled by overpopulation and urbanization; excessive technology-dependence; fierce competition for resources and artificially maintained scarcity; ignorance unmitigated by education; egotistical arrogance promoted as a cultural norm; financial barriers to opportunity and risk-taking; the acquisitiveness and inequality excited by generations of private ownership; short-sightedness regarding externalities and a lack of appropriate caution; and so on. Extending our critical view of most societal institutions, traditions and expectations, the list could become quite extensive. We could further say that such interferences are either external in nature, or internal in nature but reinforced by external conditions, and that they could even be described as *variations of poverty*, in that they amplify deprivation of a rich interiority, and place boundaries on individual self-determination that have not been voluntarily conceded. Addressing these variations of poverty in some way would then seem the wisest course for



encouraging liberty for all – again because they directly affect the *subjective felt experience* of liberty for everyone who operates in the spirit of Thoreau’s musings regarding the freedoms of a simple but richly imagined life.

We can also approach this from another angle. Consider for a moment this quote from E.F. Schumacher’s *Small Is Beautiful* (1989 reissue, p. 208-209):

“The best aid to give is intellectual aid, a gift of useful knowledge. A gift of knowledge is infinitely preferable to a gift of material things. There are many reasons for this. Nothing becomes truly ‘one’s own’ except on the basis of some genuine effort or sacrifice. A gift of material goods can be appropriated by the recipient without effort or sacrifice; it therefore rarely becomes ‘his own’ and is all too frequently and easily treated as a mere windfall. A gift of intellectual goods, a gift of knowledge, is a very different matter...The gift of material goods makes people dependent, but the gift of knowledge makes them free – provided it is the right kind of knowledge, of course.”

Schumacher is referring to knowledge that helps people become self-sufficient – less dependent and more free – and this also speaks to the means and ability to exercise liberty, and the nature of interference. If I supply you with very inexpensive food that clouds your ability to think and enervates your motivation, I can appear to be generously removing one aspect of interference (access to basic sustenance) while amplifying a much more harmful type of interference (enervation and crippled judgment); I can rob Peter of quite a lot in order to pay Paul just a tiny bit. If I then make this cheap supply of fuzzy-brain food excessively convenient – available at practically every corner market and country store – while buying out local farms and seeding what few independent farms remain with some genetically patented crops I own...Well, all of this is okay because it is just “business as usual,” a justifiable strategy in service to cost-saving efficiencies that also, quite helpfully, thwart competition. It’s a win-win – despite the reality that now consumers no longer have access to fresh, nutritious, locally produced food, or to a healthy diet that promotes mental and physical energy, or to the knowledge of how to feed their family without my products.



Along similar lines, when tobacco companies spend millions on propaganda to persuade consumers that e-cigarettes are not only safer than traditional cigarettes, but can actually help people quit smoking, they may appear to be concerned about consumer health and liberating their own customers from dependency, when really their agenda is to enslave more nicotine addicts and increase profits. And so it goes. Share cropping, the truck system, wage slavery, the company store, sweat shops...since the beginning of the industrial revolution, these systems of exploitation and domination have been presented time and time again as *opportunities* – for gainful employment, self-betterment, liberation from poverty, or the possibility of self-sufficiency – when they were actually designed from the ground up to subjugate, subdue and enslave. And all of these situations are essentially “material gifts in lieu of knowledge;” the enticements of individualistic materialism in lieu of actual freedom. And how does this substitute freedom interfere with the real thing? By creating *artificial dependencies*.

In fact I would go so far as to assert such *artificial dependencies* are at the causal headwaters of nearly all antagonisms to authentic liberty, insidiously undermining its cultural and institutional foundations, and amplifying all manner of poverty. Why? Because they so often seek to constrain, discredit or obfuscate the knowledge that leads to self-sufficiency. There is even useful language that groups all such influences together into one semantic container: *the infantilization and/or toddlerization of adult human populations*. Although we may frequently become distracted by some of the agents that emerge further downstream, insisting that those instead are the real interferences to liberty, I think we can trace most of them back to these practiced patterns of manipulation.

Bear with me as I take a brief detour to illustrate this point:

What is the dominant feature of successful commercialistic consumerism?

The dominant feature is a specific psychology that consumers believe, at a fundamental and persistent level of self-concept, that they are helpless infants,



completely dependent on the goods and services being sold them in order to obtain happiness, social status, success in friendship and love, existential safety and security, physical health, skills and abilities, and so on. Every desirable quality of life is projected onto an external consumable, rather than modeled or taught to be internally generated. In this way, commercialistic consumerism supplants love, trust, personal responsibility and meaningful relationships with the soft, warm teat of its externalizing psychological dependence. In essence, the more a marketing campaign can successfully infantilize consumers, the more a company can rely on an ever-increasing dependency of those customers to bolster revenue. Thus such marketing campaigns will either appeal to the “lowest common denominator” perceptions of wants and needs – or create artificial wants and needs that are shiny and new – in order to induce more suckling.

Why do many conservatives dislike welfare programs and “the Nanny State?”

Because, on the one hand, they see how overreliance on government programs can cause recipients to avoid personal responsibility, take advantage of benefits and dishonestly exploit those support systems. And, on the other hand, they see how bureaucratic regulation seems to treat individuals who may *want* to take personal responsibility or risks as if they were helpless babes in need of constant oversight, guidance and protection. In other words, they see how a large government bureaucracy that has become disconnected from the day-to-day realities of its citizens tends to infantilize or toddlerize those citizens into “lowest common denominator” recipients of goods and services.

What is the prevailing driver of poverty and income inequality? Using the same techniques of commercialistic consumerism to persuade and infantilize the general public, in concert with coopting the legal and political mechanisms of the State to serve their ends, the wealthy can place their self-serving agenda at the forefront of public discourse. This represents infantilization on two fronts: first, the plutocrats themselves display a remarkable fixation on their own self-gratification, promoting what will benefit themselves or their class to the exclusion of everyone else, with



little awareness or compassion regarding their negative impacts on others; and second, those who participate in fulfilling the plutocratic agenda – whether elected officials, naïve and uneducated voters, or bureaucrats reflexively fulfilling the letter of the law – are acting without sense, in impulsive reaction to the shiny baubles others have invented and placed in front of them, alternately fascinated by the movement of their own hands, or throwing a tantrum when they don't get their way.

What is the prevailing force behind jihadi terrorism? This terrorism is also primarily the result of infantilization and toddlerization. Terrorists self-infantilize when they view themselves mainly as victims of oppression, ostracization, marginalization and humiliation. When they objectify the engines of capitalist exploitation and the immorality of Western culture as “the Great Satan,” it is a magical projection of their own fears and inadequacies onto a Bogeyman in the closet, a classic feature of the toddler's narrative. At the same time, those corporate capitalist engines, and the excesses that often accompany commercialistic culture have, in fact, exploited and oppressed poor, uneducated, tribalistic cultures all around the globe for multiple generations, priming the pump for resentment and rebellion. The violent ideology of Islamist extremism (as differentiated from Islam) then becomes a helpful framework within which to both justify self-infantilization and act out against local and global infantilizers...but it is just a facilitator. It is not the source.

What is the dominant ethos behind gun ownership and gun violence? Well, it's fun to have toys. It's also fun to see what happens when I create action-at-a-distance – especially when it involves something moving or alive – and I don't have to reflect terribly much on the consequences. And when I'm afraid, or hungry, or tired, or angry...I can lash out, again without really considering or caring about how much damage I do. And, because there are certainly bad people in the world (although I have imagined far more of them than can be statistically validated), I can hide under my blanket with clenched fists and a lethal toy, in order to protect myself *and everything that's mine*. Sometimes, I also enjoy playing policeman, because that



makes me feel powerful and important in my own imagination, and because when someone does something I don't like, and can hurt them really badly. Then, when other people see how badly I can hurt someone with my big, lethal toy, they can become so afraid of me that they'll want to have big, lethal toys of their own. And, lastly but most importantly, if the Big Bad Wolf of my own government ever tries to take my toys away, I'll know they are really after my liberty, and I'll hold 'em off with my posse of gun-toting buddies. *What about these justifications for guns or gun violence isn't a toddlerized view of the world?* And of course such sentiments, beliefs and values are all encouraged by gun manufacturer propaganda and the lobbying of the NRA, who are understandably delighted that there are so many acquisitive toddlers in the U.S. who can be prompted to feel fearful, disempowered, persecuted and self-righteous.

How has Type II Diabetes become an epidemic? What foods does an infant crave? Mother's milk at first, then anything high in sugar or high in fat. Well then why not keep treating consumers as infants in terms of mass food production? As soon as possible after they are weaned from their mother's breast, why not begin feeding them the most fatty, sugary and salty foods we can find? And why not make those foods as easy to prepare, chew and purchase as possible – just process them until they are barely more substantive than puréed baby food, and put them in frozen packages, cans and jars that require zero preparation. Cream of spinach, anyone? Applesauce? Fish sticks? Milkshakes and yogurt drinks? Scrambled eggs? Spaghetti in a can? Pudding pops? Aerosol cheese? Food pouches? Instant hot cereal? It's all baby food, so convenient that all we need to do is open our mouths while cradled in the arms of the latest TV show, or comfy car passenger seat, or even our own comfortable bed. We can even have our adult baby food brought right to our home, or while we cruise about in our giant motorized baby buggies. And when we combine high fat, high sugar baby food with a self-indulgent lack of physical inactivity, we create the perfect formula for developing Type II Diabetes over time. In this situation, the food consumer refuses to grow up, and the food producer is happy to keep them in their infantilized, excessively dependent state.



What is the psychological basis of racism? The infant frightened by an unfamiliar face will cry, flail and even lash out at the stranger, screaming for the familiar arms of a family member. The basic emotional reflexes of racism aren't much different than this – a mistrust of the different, the foreign, the unknown, and an instinctual desire to be surrounded by a comfortably familiar sameness. The recipient of such prejudice can also react from a self-infantilizing perspective, in which they see themselves as a helpless victim, powerless and vulnerable, unable to alter the dynamics of the situation other than through withdrawal into a protective, ethnocentric bubble – or to likewise respond reflexively with rage and hostility. In one of the greater ironies of the postmodern era, those in a position of privilege and power in society, who see themselves as responsible for mending the rifts of racism in their culture, often resort to infantilizing the very people they wish to liberate; instead of creating space, opportunity, resources and foundations for liberty, so that the disenfranchised or disempowered can effectively *lift themselves up* according to their own values and culture, the privileged instead either attempt to change their own behaviors in self-oppressive ways, or try to gift power to the oppressed *within the dominant values system of the elite*, believing these changes will somehow honor and enhance the diversity around them. But these are just variations on a colonialist impulse, a misguided condescension that still disallows those who feel oppressed from being themselves or exercising their own judgments and values, and doesn't appreciate how the privileged retain their attitudes of power and superiority in the very act of *noblesse oblige*.

So many questions can be answered in the very same way. Why do so many young people remain dependent on their parents up through their twenties? What is really destroying traditional “family values?” Why do religious institutions become stagnant and corrupt over time? Why do so many people become unhappy in their marriages? How can democratic processes be so easily co-opted by the wealthy? Why does human industry so often become environmentally destructive? Why would someone be attracted to individualist ideologies over collectivist ones? All of these questions – and many more – can be framed within the context of either self-



infantilization and self-toddlerization, culturally reflexive co-infantilization, the infantilization or toddlerization of others by those in positions of power and privilege, or some combination of these patterns. Again I would propose that this is at the causal heart of *many, if not most* of the conditions that undermine liberty.

Now, returning from our detour, I think we should define what, precisely, the *variations of poverty* that interfere with liberty look like using the criteria we have assembled so far from these different perspectives. I believe they would include the following:

- **Poverty of existential security** – lack of food, shelter, clothing, safety from harm.
- **Poverty of access or opportunity for advancement** – being “in the right place at the right time” never seems to happen, no viable pathways out of one’s current situation seem available, no amount of effort seems to change these conditions, and barriers to access and opportunity persist.
- **Poverty of spaciousness** – lack of discretionary time, quiet, solitude.
- **Poverty of justice and equality** – experience of social prejudice, disruption of ability to obtain competent legal representation, inferior treatment under the rule of law, unequal treatment in the workplace, etc.
- **Poverty of economic freedom** – disrupted ability to generate disposable income or access desired goods, lack of opportunity to trade, disruption to development of desired skills and abilities, lack of employment opportunity.
- **Poverty of trust and social capital** – experience of alienation or disenfranchisement, lack of access to supportive social networks,



consistently encountering closed doors rather than open ones.

- **Poverty of self-reliance** – disrupted capacity for confidence, and lack of access to tools or experience that support a belief in own self-efficacy.
- **Poverty of education** – disrupted ability to think critically (i.e. carefully evaluate new information, challenge internalized assumptions, relax cognitive bias, escape conditioned habits), learn valuable skills, or gain a well-rounded understanding and appreciation of the world through diverse, interdisciplinary learning.
- **Poverty of common property** – lack of resources held in common, or lack of access to those resources.
- **Poverty of physical or mental health** – poor nutrition, excessive stress, unhealthy family dynamics, genetic predispositions for illness or substance abuse, subjection to psychologically incompatible or physically harmful environments.
- **Poverty of perception and awareness** – disrupted ability to see past the spectacle, perceive or process things multidimensionally, or maintain a neutral holding field while assessing complex information.
- **Poverty of emotional intelligence** – disrupted ability to interpret social cues, facial expressions, emotional content of interpersonal exchanges, or to empathize with the experiences of others.
- **Poverty of knowledge & information** – lack of access to established knowledge, or to accurate and independently verified new information.



- **Poverty of spirit** – disruption of connection with higher Self, spiritual insights and *gnosis*, and/or relationship with divine mystery.
- **Poverty of holistic perspective and vision** – disrupted ability to comprehend the bigger picture, cultivate a guiding purpose and intentionality, or to keep these in mind throughout the trials of daily life.
- **Poverty of moral development** – disrupted ability to mature past an egoic, tribal, or individualistic orientation (I/Me/Mine or Us vs. Them).
- **Poverty of love** – disrupted ability to develop compassionate affection for self and others, or experiencing a consistent lack of compassion from others.
- **Poverty of self-expression** – lack of opportunity and support for creative, athletic, intellectual or other form of self-expression.

And remember that in many cases these poverties are self-perpetuating, specifically because of the *artificial dependencies* – the variations of toddlerization and infantilization – that they create. Whether or not these generalizations resonate with your understanding of the world, doesn't it seem prudent to eliminate infantilizing or toddlerizing dynamics from human society, to whatever degree possible, so that its pressures, enticements and negative consequences can be de-energized? Would it hurt to either remove the prolific influence of infantilization and toddlerization on various forms of poverty, and poverty's reinforcement of paternalizing patterns? If so, then how? We can't force people to grow up if they don't wish to, and these patterns are the core facilitators of both unwieldy government bureaucracies and growth-dependent commercialist corporationism. In other words, in a croniest, clientist State capitalism that advocates monolithic for-profit enterprises, there is tremendous pressure to sustain these trends.



But wait...are we still navigating interference to negative liberty? Doesn't this broadening scope of poverty begin to emulate the concerns of "positive liberty" in its inclusion of internal qualities? Certainly, but only in the sense that those qualities can be inhibited or destroyed by external conditions; remember that we are concerned with the foundations of liberty here, and there is no difference between a freed prisoner who has no access to food, shelter or livelihood and a child who has zero access to education, social capital or equal justice due to race, gender, region of residence, or class. We are still focused on eliminating interference, not positively creating means and ability; we are just appreciating more variables, and with more precision.

On the other hand, the lone inhabitant of a shanty in the woods, whose self-reliance is a product of generations of sociological, economic, industrial and scientific development – resulting in sophisticated technologies, an affluent support system, a well-nourished childhood, critical thinking skills honed in the best education available, knowledge and resourcefulness grounded in the past successes others, and relatively elite social capital – is not really operating in isolation, but “on the shoulders of giants” as it were. Thoreau, after all, was a white pencil-maker's son living in a predominantly white society, who studied at Harvard, was mentored and patronized by Ralph Waldo Emerson, supported himself through the family pencil business, and only spent one night in jail for his “civil disobedience” before he was bailed out. Such were the affluence, pedigree, support, resources, social capital and privilege afforded him that he could choose “to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life,” and then philosophize about it. In this sense, Thoreau's means and ability to exercise freedom were positively created within the very societal conventions he railed against. It doesn't require much investigation to realize that, in the very same way, the idealized pinnacle of individual sovereignty in modern society is supported by an endless intersection of facilitative factors, like the majority of mass for an iceberg that lies below the water but is invisible to the casual eye.



So it seems that in order to maximize freedom for everyone, we are faced with some unambiguous choices: either attempt to eliminate the conditions contributing to these variations of poverty via some coercively authoritative or utopian mechanism; magically enhance human capacities to an ideal degree so these poverties have no enduring effect; theorize and fantasize about a universal individual autonomy while denying both the convergence of facilitative factors that positively enable that autonomy, and the coercive force that variations of poverty actively generate against it; or acknowledge the constraints to freedom such poverties and infantilizing patterns impose on us all, as well as the constructive realities a vast iceberg of supportive conditions necessitate, and navigate our lives accordingly. I'm not aware of other options or methods to sidestep or escape this substantive interference to liberty.

Again my intention here is also to shift the emphasis away from creating the means and ability to exercise free will as enforced by the State, and towards removing barriers to freedom in some collective fashion – that is, mitigating substantive interferences to liberty through intersubjective agreement. This may seem to be a subtle distinction, but I believe the methods of implementation shortly to be outlined will clarify significant differences – especially when we evaluate what supports our intrinsic capacities to experience and operationalize free will in more detail. Along these lines, then, what are appropriate intersubjective social agreements that foster the foundations of liberty in the most effective ways? And what are the interobjective systems and conditions that provision them?

We might assume that democracy itself is intended to moderate some of these forms of poverty, but not if we are “playing the freedom lottery.” Additionally, as far back as Aristotle's *Politics* we are warned: “extreme poverty lowers the character of democracy, so measures should be taken that will provide them lasting prosperity....” And of course as Jefferson wrote in an 1816 letter to Charles Yancey: “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.” These are just two of the poverties we've listed, but



they speak to the essence of our concerns. I believe only more advanced forms of democracy, together with additional foundations of liberty that are *collectively supported* for all, will be able to achieve a durable freedom. For even those who advocate the criticality of personal responsibility and choice still acknowledge the importance of collective agreement in support of that agency. As Amartya Sen writes in the Preface to *Development As Freedom* (1999):

“We have to recognize, it is argued here, the role of freedoms of different kinds in countering these afflictions. Indeed, individual agency is, ultimately, central to addressing these deprivations. On the other hand, the freedom of agency that we have individually is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities that are available to us. There is a deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangements. It is important to give simultaneous recognition to the centrality of individual freedom and to the force of social influences on the extent and reach of individual freedom. To counter the problems that we face, we have to see individual freedom as a social commitment.”

Intersubjective Social Agreement

Ongoing, constantly renewed and reinforced *intersubjective social agreement* that individual sovereignty should be collectively supported and maximized, acknowledging that without such agreement and intent, individual sovereignty will inevitably be either compromised, interfered with, or entirely inaccessible. Further, there should be ongoing communal engagement and dialectic around this agreement and its characteristics; this is a dynamic rather than static process, and would need to be customized to unique variables at cultural and community levels.

First a brief consideration of political obligations. As John Simmons defines these in *Moral Principles and Political Obligations* (1979): “Obligations are limitations on our freedom, impositions on our will, which must be discharged regardless of our inclinations.” (p.8) It doesn’t matter if we want to do them or not, such obligations would be fulfilled in exchange for certain privileges or rights; and in the context of our discussion here, political obligations are fulfilled *specifically to perpetuate the subjective experience of maximized personal liberty for all*. Following Simmons’ reasoning, any such obligations must be voluntary rather than compulsory, with individuals choosing to participate in a cooperative society and actively accepting their contributive responsibilities. Simmons finds none of the justifications he examines for political obligation – tacit consent, act-utility, fairness, gratitude, natural duty, etc. – to be sufficient or compelling for any citizen to subordinate individual sovereignty to the authority of the State. Only in narrow circumstances does Simmons find consenting citizens to be morally bound to their obligations. In fact he makes so many exhaustive and carefully reasoned arguments, we might be discouraged from attempting to address the inadequacies he describes. But instead, we can take an entirely different tack regarding political obligations. As a morally binding alternative, our acceptance of and investment in political obligations can arise from what I call *the unitive principle*.



In essence, the *unitive principle* arises out of compassionate regard for ourselves and our fellow human beings; as I desire what is best for myself and others, I accept the mantle of social responsibility that maximizes the greatest benefit for the greatest number for the greatest duration. Here love generates the moral force compelling my participation in political life, and being a conscious being who can empathize with and care about other conscious beings constitutes the central “particularity requirement” of that involvement. Out of compassionate regard, I can willingly and easily sacrifice some of my freedom in order for everyone else to have the same degree of liberty I do – again, because I feel concern and affection for them, and desire both their well-being and their ability and opportunity to thrive. In a very real sense, when energized by the *unitive principle* the enabling and support of another’s liberty does not feel like a moral obligation at all, but rather an intrinsically rewarding privilege. So, as with any meaningful relationship, it is love that voluntarily constrains my individual autonomy and willingly embraces mutually beneficial collective authority – an authority which itself is mutually generated, agreed upon and maintained. As I write in *Political Economy and the Unitive Principle* (2013, p. 33-34):

“Across the ages, the same pattern repeats itself: thoughts and actions that facilitate harmony, kindness and togetherness, that perpetuate mutually caring relationship above and beyond obligation or self-interest, are described with the highest moral regard....This love is not an unfocused or shallow warmth, nor is it a reflexive duty, but rather a deeply felt commitment to the happiness and well-being of others. In this lineage, that orientation is frequently referred to as *agape* - what Kohlberg aptly describes as ‘responsible love.’ In a utilitarian sense, *agape* contributes to social cohesion; it helps bind society into functional structures, facilitating collective agreement on standards of behavior, which in turn establish a baseline of mutual trust and benefit.”

This is a relatively simple exchange between each individual and everyone else in their collective, but it admittedly relies upon an adult level of moral maturity to



function well. As can be carefully surmised, radical conceptions of the primacy of autonomous, individualistic will (Robert Paul Wolff, Matthew Noah Smith, Ayn Rand et al) fall squarely in the “less mature” spectra of moral development (see Appendix A). Why? In essence, because they do not recognize the criticality of intersubjective agreements in enabling and supporting individual agency itself – that is, the necessity of mutual cooperation to actualize the foundations of individual liberty. We will address this further in a moment. It does seem that Simmons shares this insistence on individual voluntarism when he declares (p. 148): “People cannot simply force institutions on me, no matter how just, and force on me a moral bond to do my part in and comply with those institutions.” So for Simmons, as with many writers of a libertarian or anarchistic bent, an insistence on personal, voluntary choice – an uncontested individual agency – is the bedrock upon which their views of political obligation (or lack thereof) is built. But does the requirement or imposition of political obligation - or even the expectation of any form of social responsibility – really involve coerced or forceful deprivation of liberty? Must we always cast the individual’s less-than-completely-voluntary contribution to their collective in terms of Statist, authoritarian, violent oppression?

Of course not. We can easily approach a constructive authorization of involuntary political obligation that *enhances* freedom rather than suffocating it. We can begin with the argument alluded to in the previous section on Subjective Experience, which is succinctly echoed by Thomas Hill Green in his *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*:

“There can be no right without a consciousness of common interest on the part of members of a society. Without this there might be certain powers on the part of individuals, but no recognition of these powers by others as powers of which they allow the exercise, nor any claim to such recognition, and without this recognition or claim to recognition there can be no right.”²



In other words, human beings can only have rights, freedoms and individual sovereignty within a politically organized body of people – there is no individual authority or autonomy at all without collective agreement – unless one is living out in the wilderness alone. It follows, therefore, that this social conditionality is itself in an uninvited imposition on individual free will; it doesn't necessarily sanctify the formation of the State or State authority, or authorize coercion to comply, or prioritize the group above the individual, or annihilate autonomous individual agency...but it establishes the principle that *intersubjective agreement is critical to supporting and perpetuating liberty of any kind.*

I would further assert that, without such agreement, individual agency will become extremely limited. Even though unconstrained individual freedom may seem ideal in the abstract, in our discussion here the subjective experience of liberty includes *expressing, affecting and adapting*. And without social community, those variables become rather empty. To whom am I expressing myself? How will I recognize that I am affecting my environment? How will I learn and grow in order to adapt – and how will I know that I am learning and growing? All of these demand a social, communal, interdependent context, rich with interactive language, shared knowledge, affirming emotional feedback from others, and the many other compounding benefits of sociality. The solitary hermit in the woods may feel subjectively free, but without the context of human relations that distinction is pointless. So we can surmise that strict adherence to voluntarism actually contributes to countervailing illusions of liberty – not only because it contradicts these realities of how freedom is constructed, exercised and experienced, but also because it tends to injure collective authorizations that benefit the common good, disrupting civil society with potentially myopic and purely self-serving noncompliance.

We might also take note John Horton's nuanced variations on these themes, where he writes in *Political Obligation* (2010, p.171):



“In understanding ourselves *as* members of a particular polity we employ what Bernard Williams has called ‘thick’ ethical concepts to characterize that understanding, and the fact of our membership of our polity figures routinely in our processes of ethical deliberation and practical reasoning (Williams, 1985, ch. 8). These reminders do not ‘prove’ that we have political obligations (whatever that might mean), and nor are the intended to do so, but they are an important part of any remotely accurate phenomenology of our ethico-political experience: they show how people commonly think, feel and act, at least *as if* being members of a polity were something meaningful. In doing so, we acknowledge that being member of a polity has ethical significance for us; a significance that is partly cashed out in terms of relations involving responsibilities and obligations. But, more than this, they show how deeply implicated and enmeshed we are in such ways of thinking, feeling and acting. For these are not marginal or trivial features of our lives, but typically play a significant role in the way in which we locate and orient ourselves in relation to other individuals, groups and institutions both within and without our polity. In short, although their importance will vary between people, across polities and over time, they form part of the conceptual and ethical fabric through which we make sense of our lives.”

Horton also elaborates that such membership is seldom voluntary, but is simply where we find ourselves in terms of social identity, place of birth or residence, family heritage, historical relations and so on. And this membership implies *associative obligations* that reflect the accepted values of our polity – obligations similar to those we experience as familial obligations to our parents, siblings and children. We may choose to opt out of certain obligations, but we generally recognize the “the goods of order and security” as benefits of our membership, and recognize a concomitant sense of responsibility.

We might also observe Charles Horton Cooley’s assertion in *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1902) that “individual” and “society” represent a false dichotomy, because what is really represented by such distinctions is a narrow conception of the self as opposed to a wider conception of the social self as part of a higher-order,



more inclusive whole. In other words, individualism is an artificial construct of a narrow self that excludes the unitive synthesis *involving both individuality and social life*. As Cooley writes (Chapter 5: The Social Self):

“That the ‘I’ of common speech has a meaning which includes some sort of reference to other persons is involved in the very fact that the word and the ideas it stands for are phenomena of language and the communicative life. It is doubtful whether it is possible to use language at all without thinking more or less distinctly of someone else, and certainly the things to which we give names and which have a large place in reflective thought are almost always those which are impressed upon us by our contact with other people. Where there is no communication there can be no nomenclature and no developed thought. What we call ‘me,’ ‘mine,’ or ‘myself’ is, then, not something separate from the general life, but the most interesting part of it, a part whose interest arises from the very fact that it is both general and individual. That is, we care for it just because it is that phase of the mind that is living and striving in the common life, trying to impress itself upon the minds of others. ‘I’ is a militant social tendency, working to hold and enlarge its place in the general current of tendencies. So far as it can it waxes, as all life does. To think of it as apart from society is a palpable absurdity of which no one could be guilty who really saw it as a fact of life.”

Cooley frames the social self even more emphatically when he writes (Chapter 12: Freedom): “man has no existence apart from social order, and can develop his personality only through the social order, and in the same degree that it is developed.”

We can even harken back to Aristotle’s conception of human beings as ζῷον πολιτικόν, “political animals” at our very nature, which seems to correspond neatly with modern research on our innate, prosocial neurological structures (see Grit Hein, Scott Huettel, Ralph Adolphs, Antonio Damasio) and the evolutionary advantages of sociality itself (see Frans De Waal, Barbara King, E.O. Wilson, Leslie Stephen). As Aristotle argues in *Ethics*, it is only in relationship to our neighbor that



virtue, justice and equity matter; they must result in “another’s good” above and beyond our own to constitute meaningful virtue.

I propose that these approaches are all dancing around a central issue: the necessity of love. If I don’t love my family members, any sense of moral obligation to them will feel dissonant and strained. To whatever degree I don’t feel affection or compassion for the members of my community, my associative obligations likewise tend to become uncomfortable and pained. There may indeed be an improvement to individual and collective evolutionary fitness through prosocial traits, but why would I care – why would anyone care – if that prosociality isn’t energized by love? Indeed why am I writing this essay, if not to communicate with others regarding something I’m passionate about, *because I love my fellow human beings*? This is one way we can arrive at the causal significance of the *unitive principle* and its application to political obligations.

But let’s return for a moment to moral maturity – important because, so often, what is perceived as occurring is a matter of both perspective and wisdom. An adolescent may not *want* or *accept* the responsibility of contributing to the family household (through doing chores, or applying themselves in school, or caring for siblings, etc.) but they are in fact morally obligated to do so, even though the institution of “family” was thrust upon them. An emerging adult may not *want* or *accept* the responsibility of striking out on their own to become financially independent, but they are likewise morally obligated to do so, despite the fact that the institution of “adulthood” may be forced upon them when parents withdraw material support. In very much the same vein, there will sometimes be political obligations we do not like and did not choose for ourselves, but which nevertheless imply a moral duty to perform, even when, as Simmons phrases it (p.154), a “great inconvenience to ourselves is involved.” That’s just part of growing up, and its moral justification becomes clear only when we have matured sufficiently to appreciate what is necessary to secure equivalent freedoms for everyone, rather than just asserting our own autonomy *in vacuo*.



Absent my compassionate affection for those who benefit, whatever limitations I accept for myself on their behalf may indeed feel like onerous duties – so this is not a desirable outcome. Our goal, then, would be to eliminate such onerousness by encouraging the aforementioned joyful willingness in its stead, and such joyful willingness is a natural byproduct of both love and the moral maturity – the adult perspective – that accepts personal sacrifice for the good of others. Once well-seasoned loving-kindness is embedded in social culture as a primary feature of personal and collective values, mutual consent to social responsibilities becomes joyfully normative rather than grudgingly dutiful; cooperation becomes a natural consequence of gratitude; fairness becomes a low bar of reciprocity that we earnestly desire to exceed; feelings of caring, connectedness and generosity cement our commitments to association; and *agape* – defined as skillful love-in-action – offers us the surest underpinnings for a shared vision of justice, in all its complexity and subtlety. Thus structures and processes that support a moral advancement grounded in love should be considered intrinsic to the foundations of liberty. As I continue in *Political Economy and the Unitive Principle* (p.41):

“Moral creativity could also be described as ‘broad-spectrum moral synthesis,’ a product of multiple intelligences within - emotional, social, spiritual, somatic, analytic - working in unison. A moral choice can be viewed as the synthesis of all of these input streams, and the breadth of our moral vocabulary as dependent on how readily we can access and integrate these dimensions of perception-cognition. For those with a limited moral vocabulary, a rigid, black-and-white, rules-oriented assessment is a safe and reliable haven for moral judgments. But the more developed our moral creativity - and the more it is infused with skillfully compassionate affection - the more we will extrapolate subtle, nuanced, multidimensional criteria that are context-sensitive, variable and graduated.”

At the same time, another important issue is one of *abstraction*: for the farther removed we are from active involvement in our own governance and the political processes of civil society, the less likely we are to appreciate the relationship



between our political obligations and the well-being of that society in whole or part. Simmons himself speaks briefly of this in *Moral Principles and Political Obligations* (p. 140) when he writes: “I do not think that many of us can honestly say that we regard our political lives as a process of working together and making necessary sacrifices for the purpose of improving the common lot. The centrality and apparent independence of governments does not make it natural to think of political life in this way.” Considering this, it seems obvious that political processes energized by the *unitive principle* need to have immediate, regular and localized feedback loops; our involvement must feel intimate, the cooperative spirit of our participation as communal as possible, and our relationship with outcomes more direct. Concurrently, our level of moral maturity will also adjust our sense of abstraction: the more expansive our social sense of self – the more inclusive its unity, and the higher its moral altitude of associations – the less removed we will feel from political life.

What are some additional considerations? One might be that arriving at formalized intersubjective agreements that consistently facilitate this exchange in a global, increasingly complex, culturally diverse, technologically accelerating society can be profoundly challenging. This is mainly due to the intersection and amplification of competing values hierarchies that postmodern variables have introduced. Where once different worldviews could either operate in isolation from each other, dominate or annihilate each other, or escape each other through geographic relocation, those temporary pressure relief valves have become increasingly scarce. As an Earthbound species that is ever more interconnected and interdependent on multiple levels, we are now forced to confront cultural and moral incompatibilities between individuals, between individuals and their communities, between one polity and another and so on – and figure out new ways to work through them. And as long as the human population keeps expanding and deepening its global interdependence, the pressure to engineer successful intersubjective agreements for any plausibly universal political obligations will only continue to increase.



Returning to the four primary drives can assist us here, as we examine the qualities any proposed *intersubjective social agreement* evokes in each of them:

To exist. Here my voluntary obligation to support the subjective felt experience of liberty for others will be to not interfere with their existence, *and* to help create an environment in which my fellows will not experience existential threats. Not only will I refrain from annihilating others, but I will also demonstrate a trustworthy intent to help others maintain their ongoing subjective experience of unimpeded (non-threatened) existence. As a prosocial impulse, this is the charitable inclination – the compassionate caring – that energizes the Good Samaritan and helps define what *agape* looks like, and it motivates engaging *participatory mechanisms* and other civic features that support ongoing, mutually assured survival. It seems to me that health and well-being are also endemic to this obligation, so that not only would supporting and participating in systems for mental and physical healing be part of our mutual commitments, but also that everyone receives the same quality of care.

To express. Here we assure others of their freedom of self-expression, and support the foundations of liberty that provide the opportunity to do so. This is what we might call *proactive tolerance*. As another voluntary obligation, I not only accept the expressions of others around me, I appreciate and celebrate them. In postmodern Western culture we witnessed a disturbing trend of commoditization of all self-expression for a time, so that by the 1980s, only the creative efforts of very few people were appreciated by a majority of consumers, and many people seemed to abandon casual interest in creative self-expression; where once there were instruments in many homes for communal musicizing, now there were only headphones and a Sony Walkman. For many years only a handful of “big name” painters, musicians, authors, actors, composers, film makers and so on were able to find any audience at all outside of an open mike café, literary salon, art gallery, or independent theater or film festival, and these few were extravagantly compensated for their privilege, while everyone else took on a second job. We also



saw parallel trends in education, where liberal arts curricula were increasingly abandoned, and in the decline of public arts funding in general.³

But thanks to the Internet, desktop PCs, on-demand publishing, and affordable recording, formatting and editing software for all types of media, the interest in self-expression gradually revived. Now, in 2015, virtually anyone can gain access to a global audience, and although arts funding and curricula are not fully revitalized, there are now revenue streams available (like those on YouTube) that encourage the most popular forms of individual creativity. In this sense, at least, as long as we maintain an intersubjective agreement that the Internet remain open and free to all, the technological barrier to universal self-expression and appreciation will become lower and lower – especially once any lingering digital divide is eliminated.

To effect. Here our voluntary obligation is a commitment to enabling the freedom of substantive and effective action for others – that is, to provide *reliable foundations for liberty* for everyone – so that abstract conceptions of freedom become actual, *effective* freedom in the real world. This is where we return to basic assurances like freedom of movement; freedom of economic opportunity; freedom of health and well-being; freedom of access to access to skills, resources and cooperative assistance; freedom of knowledge and learning – all of which are grounded in a fundamental respect for mutuality. If everyone agrees to this as a facilitative standard for everyone else, all that remains is to engineer processes whereby these freedoms are enabled, and where abuses and interference can be skillfully countered.

To adapt. How can others adapt if they do not have access to educational, informational, financial or other communal resources? Here we must be obligated to the higher-tier functions of civil society that encourage and sustain individual freedom to learn, grow and evolve. The bias of my own worldview is that without holistically nourishing all dimensions of our being (the basis of Integral Lifework), personal and collective healing, growth and transformation won't be fully available



to everyone. Thus one intersubjective agreement I believe would energize *adaptive* freedom is to ensure everyone has access to multidimensional self-care practices, education and information from an early age.

Alas, there will always be individuals who lack the innate sensibilities, moral maturity and willingness to appreciate these political obligations (including necessary limitations on individual agency) for the good of everyone in society. For these non-citizens, such voluntary commitments and sacrifices will continue to feel like unjust expectations or onerous impositions on their individual sovereignty. For them, compassion, empathy, cooperation and the benefits granted by liberty may simply not be adequate justification for social integrity or self-restraint, and thus their subjective experience of individual sovereignty *will not feel free*. To reiterate, however, it can be easily generalized that the only instances where coercive force is justifiable – whether through self-discipline, social conformance, or the rule of law – is when free will expresses itself in non-empathic, uncompassionate, antisocial and liberty-interfering extremes. This is the commonsensical self-boumdarizing that eludes the tantruming toddler, but is the necessary tension of all cooperative human endeavors. It is the eternal dance between unrestricted individual liberty, and the collective stability required to promote and sustain that liberty over time for everyone. A central consideration will continue to be how these two concerns interact – how individual liberty will authorize collective stability, and how collective stability will empower individual sovereignty.

This seems like a good time to reemphasize that I am not interested in advocating the formation of authoritative institutions to enforce any intersubjective agreements, and more focused on defining the *processes* whereby such agreements can be consistently formulated, actualized and maintained in dynamic ways. As already suggested, I believe it is the *abstraction* of the responsibility and accountability for governance from the electorate via civic institutions that tends to weaken democracy itself. To my mind, the “legitimacy” of any form of governance relates specifically to the intimacy, immediacy and regularity of involvement in the



governing process by its citizens. A process that invites daily, direct participation in governance at all levels therefore both enhances representation of values intersections and emergent priorities, moderates rapidly evolving complexity, and fortifies the feedback mechanisms required to ensure the viability of ongoing intersubjective agreement in dynamic ways. So too will all other intersubjective agreements require equivalent personal participation. In my view, this is the *only* way we can assure what T.H. Green called “the liberation of the powers of all men equally for contributions to a common good.”⁴

Along these same lines, we cannot presume that any intersubjective agreement is a tacit fact; it requires active engagement to come into being and be continually navigated and affirmed. I would even propose that participation in intersubjective agreement not be exclusive to adulthood, but be encouraged in the young as well. The scope of youthful contributions could of course be adjusted according to age and demonstrated maturity, but the sooner a young person begins participating in a reciprocal process that maximizes their liberty, the better their chances will be to understand, value and navigate their political obligations moving forward, and expand their social sense of self. As history repeatedly demonstrates, any abdication of political participation dilutes the clarity and quality of that exchange over time, until either individual freedoms are taken for granted, or those placed in positions of influence and authority neglect the interests of those whom they are intended to represent...or both. Clearly forms of direct democracy have many advantages in this regard.

So where do we start? What are the fundamental features of intersubjective agreements that foster our liberties to *exist, express, affect* and *adapt*? As alluded to in the last section, as a society we really must take time to address our conceptions around property ownership, as these inform the relationship between individual liberty and collective stability to an enormous degree. One presumption of modern capitalist property rights and contracts is the *labor theory of appropriation*: if I add value to any natural resource by my own labor and creativity, then I can claim



ownership of that as my property (a principle widely adopted from Locke's *Treatise on Government*). More simply: I create property by applying my labor, and I own what I create. This may be further qualified by the constraint that whatever value I engineer through my labor should not interfere with freedoms of others; my benefit should aim to avoid depriving someone else of such resources (Locke: "there is enough, and as good, left in common for others"), and also aim to avoid disadvantaging them in some way (Rothbard, Nozick, Hoppe, Kirzner). Thus intersubjective agreement around this mode of both property-creation and value-creation can even include compassionate consideration for the freedom and opportunity afforded our fellows. Such formulations of the *labor theory of appropriation* may sound reasonable on the surface – especially since they are widely accepted in modern, market-based societies without much critical reflection – but these are fairly outrageous and untenable positions. And here is why....

Property Ownership is a Non-Rational Impulse that Interferes with Liberty

Academic literature on this topic exists, though it is sparse. But before we explore that, let's consider some informative conditions we find in nature.

We can readily observe ownership-like behavior across the animal kingdom, from a bear scratching claw marks in a tree to define its territory, to a badger defending its den, to one elk bull battling another elk bull over his harem, to a squirrel noisily chasing away anyone coming near his home tree, to an alpha male wolf asserting his right to eat first from the pack's kill, to a Blue Jay hiding nuts and seeds for its own future use. Our understanding of these behaviors tends to be anthropomorphized, but when we observe our own dog busily peeing over every other dogs' urine, or growling at anyone who comes near when they are gnawing on a fresh bone, we intuitively grasp why they are acting this way. Someday neuroscience will let us know whether the cognitive signature of "ownership" in the minds of these animals is similar to human mentation, but for now the *emotional response* seems to be quite



similar to our own species. And this is an important distinction, because the human sense of I/Me/Mine ownership (that is, as an extension of the egoic self) can be viewed as just that: a reactive emotional response hardwired into the survival instincts of our most primitive hindbrain. The initial impetus to “own” something seems to be a vestigial reflex of our animal selves, and little more.

This is not to say that we don’t artfully rationalize those instinctual emotional responses, making them much more meaningful and justifiable to ourselves and each other, and much more calculated and critical in the broader context of social relations. But at the root of our *impulse to own*, we find the same non-rational reflex that governs ants when they swarm an intruder to their colony, or a bird dive-bombing a predator to protect its chicks. The conscious thought “if I don’t hoard, hide and protect this resource, I will not survive, my family will not survive, and my species will not survive,” is indeed a higher order acknowledgement of that reflex, but I would propose it to be the same sort of rationalizing process we engage in after any non-rational emotional upsurge – an outburst of laughter, spontaneous infatuation, a fight-or-flight response, hurtful words spoken in anger, paranoia without basis, jealousy without evidence, unfounded trust or mistrust...and so on. Yet no matter how we rationalize them, after such upsurges have passed, we often feel chagrined, apologetic or silly about them – just as our dog, minutes after leaving off the bone over which she growled at us and bared her teeth, will sit at our feet, lick our hand affectionately, and gaze into our eyes with gratitude and love.⁵

But let’s take a gander at the academic literature. First off there seems to be a lot less research on the psychology of ownership than I had initially expected; perhaps this is because the intuitive understanding alluded to above is so pervasive. But thankfully there has been some thoughtful and careful work in this area, and some of the more recent is offered up by Floyd Rudmin, who concludes in “Cross Cultural Correlates of the Ownership of Private Property” (1992) that:



“The institution of private property serves the security of the self. Securing possessions as private property in order to fabricate, maintain, extend, and defend the self is important only if the individual self is deemed important. If the self is valued within a culture so too should be the defensive and empowering mechanism of private property.”

And further:

“The more a society values individualism, the more preferences for dominance and private property are correlated.”

At the same time, Rudmin acknowledges that this extension of the individualistic self in property also *deprives individuals of freedom* as a social norm. As he writes in “To Own is to be Perceived to Own:”

“We are geographic beings: we must be located on and move about the surface of the planet. But how narrow and constrained is the geography of any particular individual. We are utilitarian beings: we create and depend upon objects, foods, tools, and all types of implements. But again, how limited and constrained are the options of each individual. We know where our possessory interests and property rights reside and where they do not. We limit our behavior accordingly, and we expect others to know and do the same. Indeed, it is a paradox that the autonomy and freedom allowed by rights of private possession require conformity to norms of restraint.... However, property norms are so well socialized that we little realize these constraints.”

And later, perhaps even more concisely, in an interview with <http://thescienceofownership.org/>, Rudmin reiterates ownership dynamics and their impact on freedom this way:

“Adults in a propertied world have so habituated ownership self-regulation that they are unable to see or feel the extreme self-restraint that ownership imposes on



us, as we restrict ourselves to the spaces, objects, and persons to which we have rightful access or permission of the owners. More than 99% of the world around us is off-limits to any one of us, and we rarely notice that.”

Rudmin develops his assertions and conclusions with references to a wealth of other literature on the topic, including the work of Litwinski, Heider, William James, Kant, Bentham, Hume, Locke, Aristotle, Plato and even Pythagoras. In “To Own is to be Perceived to Own” he leads us through the contrasting approaches of Litwinski and Heider, landing us on the verge of understanding what motivates and sustains property possession in society, with its contrasting “social communion values and individual agency values,” mainly nudging us toward future avenues of research. But Rudmin nevertheless nudges with a confident hand, first stating Litwinski’s view that “Property is possession that has been sanctioned by social consent as formalized in law;” then examining Heider’s cognitive balance approach: “By a balanced state is meant a situation in which the relations among entities fit together harmoniously; there is no stress towards change. A basic assumption is that sentiment relations and unit relations tend toward a balanced state. It also means that if a balanced state does not exist, then forces toward this state will arise.” (Heider, 1958, p.201) And as Rudmin summarizes an interesting outcome of Heider’s complex relations analysis: “Thus, while owners and potential owners compete for possessions and must be ever defensive, they share a common attachment and liking for the regime of private possession.” In this way, the inherent tension we would assume exists around competing ownership can be explained away as a mutually gratifying societal consensus that, well, *having stuff is fun*.

Again, however, none of this relationship with property is very rational. Even the context of social expectations around property ownership, the forces at work center around liking or disliking objects that may or may not have future utility, or liking or disliking people because they possess certain objects, or wanting or not wanting what someone else owns for no particularly coherent reason, or the unconscious



habits of social conformance in acquiring property, or the gratification of our individual whims to acquire it – all of these occurring without much conscious consideration at all. Throughout Rudmin’s analysis, we find that ownership seems more about satisfying irrational appetites, both individually and collectively, than anything else. And we can find additional research to support this view, such as in a careful examination of Dan Arielly’s *Predictably Irrational* (2010) and other behavioral economics literature. As Arielly writes (p. 173-175):

“Since so much of our lives is dedicated to ownership, wouldn’t it be nice to make the best decisions about this? Wouldn’t it be nice, for instance, to know exactly how much we would enjoy a new home, a new car, a different sofa, and an Armani suit, so that we could make accurate decisions about owning them? Unfortunately, this is rarely the case. We are mostly fumbling around in the dark. Why? Because of three irrational quirks in our human nature.

The first quirk...is that we fall in love with what we already have....The second quirk is that we focus on what we may lose, rather than what we may gain....The third quirk is that we assume other people will see the transaction from the same perspective as we do....”

So while the focus on the precise psychology and sociality of property ownership itself begs closer study, the main assertion here is that the *impulse* to own, the habit to possess and keep, is not that much more advanced than what animals demonstrate from instinct. And it happens to be a habit that not only deprives everyone in society of many individual freedoms, but also tends to create enormous inequity – regardless of the reality that most of us seem content to acquiesce and agree with the interferences and constraints to liberty private ownership imposes on us because...well, *having stuff is fun*.



The Value Calculations Involved in Property Ownership are Capricious, Arbitrary and Egocentric

The essence of the labor theory of appropriation relies on an additional conceit that human beings are the sole arbiters of all value-creation in the Universe; that is, that human activity is the only mechanism for generation and evaluation of import or utility, and that nothing preceding a human's creative imagination or cumulative effort has intrinsic value at all. This is profoundly anthropocentric, egocentric and myopic. It imbues human acts of discovery and utility with magical importance, and disregards all other systems of valuation – even those proposed by other humans – as subordinate to the I/Me/Mine school of appropriation. This is as ridiculous as it is immature, but requires additional clarification as to just how ridiculous and immature it actually is.

I need this field to plant my crops, and no other human is using it. So if I plant my crops there, adding value to the unpossessed land, I can now own the land (per the embodiment of the labor theory of appropriation in the Homestead Act, for example). But here's the rub: the land is actually home to a species of bee that doesn't exist anywhere else on the planet, and by farming the land, I destroy the bee habitat and, eventually, the entire population of that species of bee. Many decades later, it is discovered that the species of bee I inadvertently destroyed is the only species capable of resisting Colony Collapse Disorder, so that through my ignorant, short-sighted, self-important, willy-nilly appropriation of land, I have contributed to the end of pollination for a huge variety of crops, resulting in a global human diet of gruel after the remaining pollinizing bee populations have died off from CCD.

Yes, this is just a thought experiment, but how often has something similar actually happened? Humans have poisoned water supplies and aquatic habitats with mining and drilling, killed off thousands of species by destroying or polluting delicate ecosystems, made the air unbreathable for all manner of creatures (including fellow humans) in an ongoing global industrial revolution, and fished or hunted hundreds



of other species with unsustainable vigor. It seems that, although conventional value calculations insist on including interference with the freedom of other humans, they often do not include interfering with the survival of other species, biodiversity, *or even sustainable practices that allow these arbitrary, human-assigned values to be perpetuated beyond one or two generations.*

Increasingly this anthropocentric perspective is being eroded by common sense, compassion and empathy that extend beyond homo sapiens. Here again, moral evolution is in evidence. In the U.S. we have the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, the Endangered Species Act, Australia has recognized the personhood of dolphins, and Germany and other nations have promoted the *precautionary principle* regarding new technologies and policies that could have unanticipated health or environmental impacts. With the reluctant but scientifically inevitable acceptance of human influence on climate change, countries around the globe are also aiming to curb carbon emissions. And wherever we find a Wildlife Refuge or even a National Park, our collective anthropocentrism may also have relaxed ever-so-slightly – though in many cases only when such land has no obvious commercial potential. In other words, at least some humans are finally starting to grow up a little, breaking free of myopic egocentrism to embrace a perspective that includes the *inherent value* of natural ecosystems and other species.

Even so, we are only just beginning to appreciate the importance of biodiversity and the complexity of the ecosystems on which we so casually rely, and not all humans have developed compassion and empathy for them. Additionally, many of these mature realizations only propagate because they are enforced by the State, and this presents problems of its own – including aggressive efforts of the selfish to circumvent restrictions. Even in this context, however, future-proofing for human benefit (i.e. conservation for future exploitation) often remains the more politically viable justification of any environmental protections, as we humans just cannot see the forest for the trees. Again this seems to reinforce the idea that we all have to grow up quite a bit more before we overcome anthropocentrism completely – and



especially if we expect human planning and activities to become less self-important in rhizomatic, highly distributed, Stateless ways.

That said, to further explore the failings of the labor theory of appropriation: even within the spectrum of human values-creation, we frequently find contradictory or fickle valuations – or valuations that are invented purely to justify human activities. A plant isn't edible or usable so we don't care about it, then some new process makes it commercially viable and, suddenly, we do care. We value gold for aesthetic, historical and emotional reasons, prizing it above other metals – even ones that are much more rare. A short-term consumer fad will cause some children's toy or performer's concert tickets to abruptly become scarce, precious and expensive. A longer-term collector fad will cause a particular era or style of art rise exponentially in value for a time. Two siblings didn't care at all about their mother's china collection for the entire span of her life, but, when she passes on, suddenly they fight viciously over ownership in probate court. A pharmaceutical company will use direct consumer advertising to drum up fear around a hitherto unknown ailment, fabricate data about their new drug's efficacy or hide data about its risks, and then charge exorbitantly for their product's artificial value. Solar panel installers will exaggerate the urgency of buying photovoltaic systems, so that consumers, as they rush to beat tax incentive deadlines or utility caps that are in reality still years away, pay unnecessary premiums for solar power. And although there is debate over whether an "endowment effect" really exists or not,⁶ if it were to exist that would further support a conclusion that humans invoke value out of non-rational thin air. We are fantastic rationalizers, manufacturing value where none really exists, or justifying it retroactively. And yet we rely on these impulsive, arbitrary value rationalizations to establish proprietary rights! How does this make any sense at all?

We can also see just how hypocritical the theory of labor appropriation is when we evaluate who is willing to own any *negative consequences or externalities* of value-adding activities. Why is it that someone who adds value to something from their



own labor may benefit from this activity, but not be responsibility for deleterious consequences of that activity? A gun manufacturer can lobby Congress to lift an assault weapons ban, a high-capacity magazine ban, and other gun regulations that restrict consumer access to increasingly lethal technology, then successfully market those technologies to people who perpetrate mass shootings⁷...with absolutely no consequence to themselves as gun manufacturers despite having engineered a steady increase to their revenues in just this fashion.⁸ Wall Street bankers chasing after profit, relying on fraudulent practices and unstable investment instruments, can drive the U.S. economy into a recession, causing millions to lose their homes and livelihood...while those bankers suffer no personal consequences, and instead are financially rewarded for their failures.⁹ An educational institution can insist that a child's parents sign away their right to sue in the event of the child's injury or death with a simple waiver, release and hold harmless agreement...while first charging for educational benefits to that child in order to make a profit, then asserting credit for positive outcomes of that education (job placement, career success, cultural capital, social capital, etc.). I have always found these situations illustrative of an especially glaring form of hypocrisy. It is this mindset that quite naturally creates a situation where huge for-profit industries that are "too big to fail" can make egregious miscalculations in their business panning, then expect the American taxpayer to bail them out.

But perhaps I wander too far afield, for when we return to Rudmin's work, we discover in his 1998 "Cross-Cultural Correlates of the Ownership of Private Property: A Summary of Five Studies" that Locke was simply mistaken. It turns out that, in hunting and gathering societies like the Native Americans Locke was using to support his thesis, the theory of labor appropriation just does not hold. As Rudmin writes: "Where people do in fact gather acorns and apples, where they do hunt venison, in explicitly those conditions, private ownership tends not to be the norm. To the contrary, hunting and gathering peoples tend not to have private ownership of land or of goods. Typically, they secure their sustenance, not by private rights and not by means of exclusive access to resources, but by rights of



sharing and by means of intra-communal and inter-communal access to resources.” Locke’s assertions were, in essence, an arbitrary projection that lacked empirical grounds, and what he believed to be a “natural law” was nothing more than his own imaginative invention.

So how did we arrive where we are today? Why was Locke’s error so readily adopted by successive generations? One possibility that resonates strongly for me is the abandonment of any “bigger picture” framework (i.e. a unitive, metaphysical worldview) in favor of individualistic materialism. As Wael Hallaq describes it in his “Fragmentation of the Secular” lecture at the VIDC:¹⁰ “Matter is thereby rendered ‘brute, inert and even stupid’ (Boyle). All the spiritual agencies – or anima – would be banished from the Universe, rendering matter spiritually meaningless, now [only] relevant in a materialistic, anthropocentric sense. If [natural] matter exists in a brute and inert form, then the only reason for its existence...is its service to man. It should not be surprising then that [at the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th Centuries] leading European thought began to see Nature as the object of man and his knowledge – as a dumb and manipulable object. The modern State and its sovereign will, represented in the law, was not only an integral part of this worldview, but also one of its chief architects.” This, Hallaq asserts, created an “epistemologically shattered world” where our sole focus becomes an *a priori* will “whose predominant concern is to dominate Nature, control it, transform it, subjugate it, and sever it ontically, ontologically, psychologically and spiritually from our systems of value.” It is a world where only “brute facts” hold sway, and where, consequently, inherent value that may be metaphysical or intuited cannot be empirically validated, and is therefore summarily rejected. Could it be, then, that the same love affair with empiricism and materialism that sought to purge Nature of all her mysteries also annihilated the intrinsic worth of anything not resulting from human industry? It seems reasonable to conclude this is the case.

Lastly, I can’t help but reiterate that property rights of any kind are inherently different than other rights – for, in a proprietary society, whenever I own something,



others explicitly do not own that thing, and I can therefore interfere with the liberties of others (their right to use land, for example) based on my ownership, and can do so even if that ownership is grounded in the capricious suppositions of arbitrary valuation we have just illuminated. So what is a proposed solution? How can we function as a society in which all resources can be utilized by all individuals for the good of all, without the corrosive distortions and oppressions inherent to private ownership...?

Conclusion: Possession without Ownership, and Ownership without Possession

The concept of private property is an irrational, animalistic impulse that, at best, frustrates the mutual benefits of liberty in a cooperative society, and, at worst, progressively undermines individual sovereignty over time across all of that society. In order to achieve the subjective experience of liberty in a universal way, it seems clear that one of our primary intersubjective agreements be that private property and individualistic concepts of ownership attenuate – along with all systems that rely upon them – and that the advantages of common property and systems inspired by horizontal collectivism increase in their stead. This trajectory is also echoed by the *unitive principle* of love, which encourages us to rise above the I/Me/Mine acquisitiveness of immature moral orientations, and toward more generous, charitable and egalitarian standards of interaction. But how can we know what those concepts and systems will look like in the real world...?

Thankfully, once again this work has already been substantively initiated. Elinor Ostrom devoted much of her professional life to studying organically occurring common pool resource management and the advantages of polycentric governance. Through extensive fieldwork and cross-cultural comparisons, she uncovered a consistent set of self-organizing principles that had developed around sustainable natural resource access and utilization in several communities – and which soundly contradicted Garret Hardin’s “tragedy of the commons” being a foregone conclusion.



As described in *Collective Action, the Commons, and Multiple Methods of Practice* (2010, p.99):

“Ostrom finally dropped the idea of identifying the *specific* rules that tended to generate success. She moved up a level in generality to try to understand broader institutional regularities among the systems that were sustained over a long period of time. The concept of ‘design principle’ seemed an apt characterization of the regularities derived from this perspective. These regularities were not design principles in the sense that the irrigators, fishers, forest dwellers, and others who had invented and sustained successful common-property regimes over several centuries had these principles overtly in their minds. The effort was to identify the core underlying lessons that one could draw out from the cases of long-sustained regimes, and then to compare these successes with the failures to assess whether the failures were characterized by the same features.”

In 1990, Ostrom offered eight of these successful design principles for consideration in further research in her field. Over the ensuing years, dozens of follow-up studies were performed to empirically validate what Ostrom had proposed. In 2010, Michael Cox, Gwen Arnold and Sergio Tomás performed a detailed meta-analysis of 91 such studies in “A Review of Design Principles for Community-based Natural Resource Management.” What they found generally conformed to Ostrom’s design principles, though they also chose to expand on the original eight for greater clarification and specificity. Here is that result (Table 4, p. 38):

- 1A User boundaries:** Boundaries between legitimate users and nonusers must be clearly defined.
- 1B Resource boundaries:** Clear boundaries are present that define a resource system and separate it from the larger biophysical environment.
- 2A Congruence with local conditions:** Appropriation and provision rules are congruent with local social and environmental conditions.
- 2B Appropriation and provision:** The benefits obtained by users from a common-pool resource (CPR), as determined by appropriation rules, are proportional to the amount of inputs required in the form of labor, material,

or money, as determined by provision rules.

- 3 **Collective-choice arrangements:** Most individuals affected by the operational rules can participate in modifying the operational rules.
- 4A **Monitoring users:** Monitors who are accountable to the users monitor the appropriation and provision levels of the users.
- 4B **Monitoring the resource:** Monitors who are accountable to the users monitor the condition of the resource.
- 5 **Graduated sanctions:** Appropriators who violate operational rules are likely to be assessed graduated sanctions (depending on the seriousness and the context of the offense) by other appropriators, by officials accountable to the appropriators, or by both.
- 6 **Conflict-resolution mechanisms:** Appropriators and their officials have rapid access to low-cost local arenas to resolve conflicts among appropriators or between appropriators and officials.
- 7 **Minimal recognition of rights to organize:** The rights of appropriators to devise their own institutions are not challenged by external governmental authorities.
- 8 **Nested enterprises:** Appropriation, provision, monitoring, enforcement, conflict resolution, and governance activities are organized in multiple layers of nested enterprises.

Ostrom had carefully documented that these self-organizing resource management schemas were community-synthesized approaches that did not rely on private ownership on the one hand, or government institutions on the other. At their core, Ostrom noted that communication, relationship and trust among individuals were extremely beneficial ingredients, and that without these factors, noncooperation and resource exhaustion were much more prevalent.¹¹ At the same time, she frequently reiterated during her career that there is seldom a “one size fits all” solution to all resource management challenges, and thus she frequently turned to *polycentric governance* approaches to any complex economic system.



What is “polycentric governance?” In short, it utilizes a multi-tiered approach where input, responsibility, accountability and interaction from local, regional, national and international actors is combined to formulate and execute long-term, sustainable governance of complex (and sometimes even chaotic) socio-ecological systems. In a 2012 *International Journal of the Commons* article entitled “Polycentric Governance of Multifunctional Forested Landscapes,” Elinor Ostrom and Harini Nagendra summarized polycentric benefits this way:

“Polycentric governance tends to reduce opportunistic behaviour in forested and urban settings, even though no institutional arrangement can totally eliminate opportunism with respect to the provision and production of collective goods. Allowing citizens to form smaller-scale collective consumption units encourages face-to-face discussion and the achievement of common understanding. Creating larger collective consumption units reduces the likelihood of strategic free-riding behaviour of the wealthy. Larger units also can more effectively cope with goods and services that have large-scale effects and real economies of scale.”¹²

To explore Ostrom’s work is to encounter a third way of economics – not free-market-centric, and not State-centric, but a nuanced interplay between individuals, organically self-organizing community cooperation, and various scopes of formal institutional governance. It’s really as if Ostrom is grabbing hold of the butting heads of neoliberals, anarcho-capitalists and Statist progressives, gently turning them away from each other’s extremes of theoretical debate and toward an elegant, well-evidenced solution *operating in the real world*. “Look here,” we can hear her saying to them, “when people trust each other, and communicate with each other, and follow some simple design principles, they can very often solve challenging natural resource dilemmas, avoiding both depletion and opportunistic free-riding, while holding those resources as common property.” Sure, larger scopes of government need to be on-board, and production and management may ultimately engage free markets on a global scale, but the natural resources (or services, as the case may be) are neither fully socialized nor fully privatized. They are entrusted to



the community of the commons; in a real sense, they are not owned, but merely borrowed.

This is one way we can arrive at ownership without possession, and possession without ownership, in order to avoid the pitfalls of private property that we have elucidated thus far. When there is trust and community, and solutions are collective and participatory at that level, and in turn interface with larger civic institutions and processes that are democratically controlled, then the level of polycentric investment invites closer collaboration and cooperation from everyone involved. As Nagendra and Ostrom remind us, “Solutions need to be matched to ecological and social conditions so that participants have incentives to govern subunits of complex systems in a sustainable manner.”¹³ This is the drumbeat we hear again and again in Ostrom’s work: such successes require localized understanding of the people and their environment, and it is from that understanding and involvement that appropriate incentives will arise. Why? Because at this level, where people are invested in their community, they care about each other, and about what happens to the resources upon which they rely.

And how do we foster trust except through mutual compassion and understanding? Isn’t each person’s love for others and the world around them again at the root of our political obligations here? Isn’t the *unitive principle* sufficient to cement those obligations and energize our ongoing commitment to them? And isn’t it worth investing in some pilot implementations to empirically validate this? I suspect that many will need more proof, though for me the link is obvious. In addition, Ostrom also warned of overgeneralizing her research, applying it to situations, resources, relationships and institutions not adequately documented through existing research. And of course this is a sound caution from the scientific tradition. But I think we have something meaningful to work with here; one of many starting points for synthesizing a new relationship with property that is less tyrannical, and more supportive of intersubjective autonomy.



What About Personal Property?

We can also derive with some confidence from the research of Ostrom and others around CPRs that individual sovereignty and original appropriation can be entirely de-linked; it is simply not necessary to own everything in sight in order to steer a course through life, earn a living, feel secure in one's social position, or constructively contribute to society. However, an important caveat for what we've discussed thus far is that *personal* property ownership may still be a necessity with respect to individual sovereignty and identity. For everything from a child's doll to a trade worker's tools, the advantages of having some form of personal property ownership – that is, exclusive control over a particular item – seem obvious. In the sense of privacy, personal control over one's living space and the property contained within it would seem to fall into the same category. Perhaps, aligning with Rudmin's assertions, such property and spaces are projections of an individualized self; regardless, I would argue they are, on some fundamental level, psychologically necessary.

The scope of such ownership will probably change from culture to culture, and individual to individual, but it seems reasonable and prudent to establish some sort of upper limit to personal property. We could also approach this scope in terms of exclusive use of common property, rather than ownership per se, either for a designated period or according to some specific need or outcome. At the same time, it is understandable that at some levels of moral or spiritual development, even personal possessions would lose their importance. But for most of humanity, a wedding ring is not precious because of its monetary value, but because of its sentiment; a favorite toy is a child's gateway to playful joy rather than a signifier of personal wealth; and a private, undisturbed room to sleep, make love or meditate is not a privilege of social status but the necessity of a richly intimate life. Thus the importance of a broad category of either personal property – or the exclusive outcome-based, needs-based or term-based use of common property – cannot be ignored.

Interobjective Systems, Conditions & Artifacts

Interobjective systems, conditions and artifacts that foster the felt experience of individual sovereignty and ongoing *intersubjective social agreement*.

Although still malleable and customizable, there would likely be little debate about these universal processes, and they would have cross-cultural value and representation as relatively static features and functions of society. Thus these become social objects, systems, artifacts and conditions that relate to each other and society in fixed ways, rather than via dialogical dynamics between individuals and groups.

Having read this far, you will undoubtedly have come to suspect a chicken-and-egg conundrum inherent to the foundations of freedom being proposed. Let's say we can agree that liberty is optimized when social and economic organization at the community level is emphasized; when trust, collaboration and transparent communication are motivated by mutual affections; when private property ownership is relaxed in favor of a collectively managed commons; when civic institutions and governance at all levels are controlled at least in part through direct democracy; and when moral maturity embraces collective good above individual gratification. Okay, but how do we promote such conditions? Amid mass shootings, terrorist bombings, special interest hijacking of the political process, and left-right polarization of the body politic, how do we operationalize our *intersubjective social agreements* and the values they represent? In a world where Donald Trump can become a Republican frontrunner in a Presidential primary, where half of the U.S. electorate consistently votes to weaken democracy and strengthen plutocracy, where the democratic aspirations of an Arab Spring mainly delivered failed states and the oppressions of Islamist extremism to its hopeful populations, and where huge transnational corporations hold more power and influence than most governments...how can we ever bridge such a gap? How can we relieve the



poverties that interfere with liberty, when those most subject to them will often fight fiercely, irrationally and even violently to hold on to them...?

I believe this is where *interobjective systems, conditions and artifacts* become part of the solution. These represent the technologies, institutions, monetary systems, legal systems and so on upon which a given society is intended to function. They are created to maintain the material framework within which our liberty operates and is functionally supported. To clarify with some conventional examples: Interobjective *systems* are things like a pervasive education system or justice system; corresponding interobjective *conditions* would be the automatic cultural expectation to attend school and acquire an education, or the involvement of the justice system in regulating the rule of law; and corresponding *artifacts* would include things like a diploma or a stop sign.

The challenge for us in political economies dominated by State capitalism and private ownership is that the corporations who produce and maintain certain supportive technologies tend to prioritize their own profit-based concerns and agendas, civic institutions can become bureaucratically disconnected from both the will of the people and new values developments in society, and the rule of law can become distorted or coopted by special interests. When such distortions occur, then all of the foundations for liberty we have been discussing can be gradually eroded, forgotten, neglected, diluted or otherwise undermined. In addition, if there is too great a disconnect between *interobjective systems, conditions and artifacts* and the moral altitude and values hierarchies of the general population, that dissonance will antagonize both citizens and institutions, resulting in either paralysis, rebellion or both. I think this is precisely what we see happening in the U.S., especially in the relationship between conservative-leaning members of the electorate and federal and state governments. In this case, because a significant and highly motivated minority of the U.S. population feels that civic institutions and processes do not adequately reflect conservative values, that minority seeks to eviscerate those institutions and processes. In a substantive way, U.S. conservatives are clinging to



some of the variations of poverty that suppress their own freedom, while railing against central authority established to ensure liberty for all. From one perspective, the moral evolution of the U.S. Constitution and the embodiment of that evolution in *interobjective systems, conditions and artifacts* over time has effectively exceeded the moral maturity of an agitated and activist group of citizens. At the same time, this group and others feel so disconnected from the political process that voter apathy abounds – likely due to the aforementioned abstracting of the governing process.

So what can be done? How can the moral maturity of the U.S. electorate be revived, and all constituents reconnected to the political process of civil society? And how could similar challenges be addressed in other parts of the world? First let us remember Elinor Ostrom’s warning that “one-size-fits-all” solutions seldom have the flexibility to be universally effective, and thus a preference for polycentric proposals that can be tailored to local variables in each tier of governance. At the same time, we want to aim for ways to embody *intersubjective social agreements* that maximize liberty in the same way that a legal system aims to embody the core principles of its rule of law for everyone. Do we have proven examples of ways to accomplish all of this? I think we have all the pieces – many of which have proven reliable and sustainable – but they just haven’t yet been fit together into a cohesive whole.

Let’s take a moment to frame this in terms of cultural expectation of reward and punishment – in a way applying Ostrom’s “graduated sanctions” to both ends of the motivational spectrum. Any proposed civic institutions that reinforce and conserve the foundations of liberty as we have described them would need to reward (incentivize) the following – at least as they are expressed in recurring behaviors – in graduated ways:

- Taking personal responsibility for one’s own well-being, and the well-being of larger systems and relationships (society, immediate environment, larger ecosystems, natural resources, etc.).

- Interest in learning for its own sake, to understand complex relationships between concepts and fields of study, and to better oneself and society.
- Trust, cooperation and positive expectations of both community and government.
- Active engagement in political processes and joyful commitment to political obligations.
- Generosity, non-attachment to material wealth, sharing, etc.
- Open, cooperative, mutually supportive orientation to fellow citizens with respect to opportunities, resources and political influence.
- Prosocial behaviors and healthy emotional states (kindness, joy, tranquility, patience, tolerance, etc.).

By the same token, those institutions would need to discourage (disincentivize) the following – at least as they are expressed in recurring behaviors – in graduated ways:

- Reinforcement of infantilization and toddlerization regarding one's own well-being, and the well-being of larger systems and relationships (society, immediate environment, larger ecosystems, natural resources, etc.).
- Disinterest in learning for its intrinsic rewards and contributive benefits, elevating punitive fears of failing tests and low grades, and, via emphasis on rote memorization, disconnecting knowledge from interdisciplinary relationship and understanding.
- Mistrust, fear and negative expectations of both community and government.
- Apathy or noninvolvement in political processes and resentful avoidance of political obligations.
- Avarice, acquisitiveness, hoarding, theft, etc.
- Secretive, competitive, aggressive, hierarchical orientation to fellow citizens with respect to opportunities, resources and political influence.



- Antisocial behaviors and unhealthy emotional states (rage, jealousy, anxiety, stress, impatience, intolerance, etc.)

In our current interval of history, all manner of institutions have actually been energizing behaviors and attitudes that *invert* these incentives and disincentives, reinforcing the aforementioned poverties, and amplifying infantilization and toddlerization. Contemporary society seems to entirely contradict what both democracy and free enterprise originally set out to achieve, creating “graduated sanctions” and social structures that more resemble medieval feudalism than the advanced ideals of liberty. At the same time, these social structures have granted us a deeply felt illusion of freedom through entertaining distractions, material excesses, polemic discourse and medicating addictions – all of which carefully steer us away from recognizing or investigating our ever-increasing deprivation and servitude. It is as if modern society has taken an extended trip to Disneyland, then slowly forgotten that this is an amusement park and not reality. This happens because we receive partial satisfaction of our primary drives, an intermittent positive reinforcement akin to winning a “this makes me feel subjectively free” lottery every now and again. I won’t take the time to elaborate here on what I believe to be pervasive evidence that supports these conclusions, but would encourage you to consult both *Political Economy and the Unitive Principle*, and my essay [“Escaping the Failures of Capitalism,”](#) for more extensive elaborations and resources. However, whether someone chooses to entertain these conclusions or not, the viability of the patterns we wish to incentivize and energize transparently aligns with the foundations of liberty we’ve already discussed.

Infrastructure & Essential Services

So how is this accomplished? Simply put, we can rely on *Participatory mechanisms with built-in accountability* to assist in this process, and we’ll cover those in the next section. However, those mechanisms won’t function very well – especially in our



complex, postmodern, multitiered technological, political, cultural and economic environments – without sophisticated and extensive infrastructure and services. Remember the iceberg metaphor I used earlier? Well, that massive support structure, often invisible or taken for granted, is what *interobjective systems, conditions and artifacts* will provide. This supportive infrastructure and essential services would include things like:

- **Ubiquitous Technology:** Pervasive internet communication technology and access equality; renewable energy production that is highly distributed and available to all; variations of equally available personal communications technology based on universally implemented standards.
- **End-to-End Mass Transit:** So that regular schedules of bus, trolley, train and plane can seamlessly transport people from within a mile of their homes to within a mile of any other urban or suburban destination on the planet at a relatively low cost.
- **Open Mediasphere:** All media and communications platforms, technologies, frequencies, channels and bandwidths are available to all contributors, and accessible by all consumers.
- **Equitable Legal Systems & Services:** Public funding of all lawyers and legal services; qualified judges appointed to limited terms by lottery and subject to recall votes; juries selected by lottery; adoption of Dworkin’s “Law as Integrity” or other consistency standard.
- **Protected Nutrition:** Guaranteed availability of low-cost basic nutrition; a robust and sustainable food supply (organic, genetically diverse, non-engineered); a move away from large, centralized production to more distributed, local production.
- **Universal Public Education:** For all levels of education, in all disciplines, provided equally to all applicants.



- **Universal Wellness Services:** For healing, health, well-being and self-care training and resources in all dimensions, and inclusive of encouraging moral development.
- **Universal Employment Training & Job Placement**
- **Universal Non-Profit Unemployment, Disability & Retirement Insurance**
- **Public Health & Safety Services:** Well-provisioned and staffed fire, police, ambulance, rescue, disaster mitigation, consumer protection, etc.
- **Public Housing:** Temporary public housing when pursuing education, transitioning between jobs or regions, engaging in retraining, holding public office, or during periods of disability, recovery or medical treatment.
- **Public Monetary System & Macroeconomic Stability:** Monetary system styled after the “Chicago Plan,”¹⁴ and a favoring of a stable exchange rate and independent monetary policy over free capital flows.
- **Non-Profit Member-Owned Banking:** No more privately owned banks; no more privatize profits with socialized risks; no more high-risk speculative instruments.
- **Public Mail Service**
- **Reintegration Rehabilitation & Training for All Non-Violent Criminals**

Not only do these help provide a “universal social backbone” for civil society and its participatory mechanisms, they also form the basis of graduated rewards for behaviors that support the foundations of liberty for all, and graduated penalties for behaviors that undermine those foundations. There are a number of ways to enable accountability, but one would be a permanent database that tracks accumulated and expended *social credits*. These credits could only be used in the utilization of the essential infrastructure and services like those listed above, and they could not be traded. Although everyone would be granted monthly recurring baseline credits (in the spirit of Douglas’ National Dividend and other conceptions of a “basic income”), those credits could be increased – and potentially decreased – based on the *quality* and *quantity* of a) formal participation in civil society (direct democracy, citizens



commissions, jury duty, etc.); b) creative, inventive, intellectual and technical contributions to culture; c) demonstration of compassion, service to others, and moral maturity; d) improvement of community, advocacy of interculturalism, conflict resolution, group leadership, etc.; e) structural improvements, such as mitigation of human impact on natural environments, CPR management streamlining; etc.; and so on – I would anticipate hundreds of such “supporting the foundations of liberty” categories, most of which directly correlate with the relief of some variation of poverty. And of course behaviors and activities that antagonize the foundations of liberty and increase poverties would also need to be carefully defined.

Want to dedicate yourself to enriching society with your creativity, intellect, hard work and generosity? You will earn extra credits. Have a tendency to disrupt the well-being of your neighbors, cause harm to the environment, enrich yourself in unethical ways, abuse your position of authority, or perhaps circumvent all political obligations? Then your credits will not rise above the baseline – though they would also not drop too far below it, as that might incentivize more criminal behavior. Perhaps there could be other penalties as well, such as variations in the quality of certain services. Will there be folks who try to game the system? Sure, which is why there also need to be system monitors who are themselves accountable democratic controls.

The Transitional Role of The Wealthy

Yet another chicken-and-egg dilemma also presents itself: How can we provide a robust “universal social backbone” without relying on either an oversized federal government or equally gargantuan for-profit corporations? And how could we engineer graduated incentives and disincentives for the foundations of liberty when there is reflexive and aggressive resistance to doing so from all-of-the-above...? To answer the first question, we will need to concurrently develop robust *participatory*



mechanisms outlined in the next section. To answer the second, let's return for a moment to Aristotle (*Politics*, Book VI, Part V):

"Yet the true friend of the people should see that they be not too poor, for extreme poverty lowers the character of the democracy; measures therefore should be taken which will give them lasting prosperity; and as this is equally the interest of all classes, the proceeds of the public revenues should be accumulated and distributed among its poor, if possible, in such quantities as may enable them to purchase a little farm, or, at any rate, make a beginning in trade or husbandry. And if this benevolence cannot be extended to all, money should be distributed in turn according to tribes or other divisions, and in the meantime the rich should pay the fee for the attendance of the poor at the necessary assemblies; and should in return be excused from useless public services. By administering the state in this spirit the Carthaginians retain the affections of the people; their policy is from time to time to send some of them into their dependent towns, where they grow rich. It is also worthy of a generous and sensible nobility to divide the poor amongst them, and give them the means of going to work. The example of the people of Tarentum is also well deserving of imitation, for, by sharing the use of their own property with the poor, they gain their goodwill. Moreover, they divide all their offices into two classes, some of them being elected by vote, the others by lot; the latter, that the people may participate in them, and the former, that the state may be better administered. A like result may be gained by dividing the same offices, so as to have two classes of magistrates, one chosen by vote, the other by lot."

If the nobles of ancient Carthage and Tarentum could voluntarily share their wealth and political power, then part of the solution is today's elite volunteering along similar lines – in this case within a much more complex environment and with new technologies and tools, but with similar intent. If the wealthiest members of today's society jointly agreed to support the formation of a "universal social backbone" and propagate new memplexes that prioritize the foundations of liberty, this would not only remove barriers to engineering a freer society, but accelerate its reification. One of the more beneficial *interobjective systems, conditions and artifacts* would therefore be an organized commitment from the established elite to sustain this transition. Consider, for example, if the world's most influential think tanks, affiliations and families were to adopt the attenuation or eradication of *all variations of poverty* previously alluded to as their primary agenda, and used their



extraordinary resources to champion authentic freedom. What greater legacy could there be?

At the same time, top-down approaches tend to fail if they don't coincide with grass-roots activism – for the problem intrinsic to *noblesse oblige* operating in the vacuum of self-referential values arises once again. Instead we must remember what Paulo Freire elegantly articulates in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (rev. ed. 1996, p.50-51):

“The oppressed, who have been shaped by the death-affirming climate of oppression, must find through their struggle the way to life-affirming humanization, which does not lie *simply* in having more to eat (although it does involve having more to eat and cannot fail to include this aspect). The oppressed have been destroyed precisely because their situation has reduced them to things. In order to regain their humanity they must cease to be things and fight as men and women. This is a radical requirement. They cannot enter the struggle as objects in order *later* to become human beings.

The struggle begins with men's recognition that they have been destroyed. Propaganda, management, manipulation – all arms of domination – cannot be the instruments of their rehumanization. The only effective instrument is a humanizing pedagogy in which the revolutionary leadership establishes a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed. In a humanizing pedagogy the method ceases to be an instrument by which the teachers (in this instance, the revolutionary leadership) can manipulate the students (in this instance, the oppressed), because it expresses the consciousness of the students themselves....

...A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice co-intentional education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves its permanent re-creators. In this way, the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement.”

We might assume that the will-to-freedom – the innate desire for the subjective experience of liberty – is a given for all of humanity, and that may very well be true



when the four primary drives aren't being satisfied at all. But when countervailing illusions of freedom successfully anesthetize these drives with "playing the freedom lottery" inducements, when bread and circuses distract us from the liberties we lack, and when the demands and stresses of daily life overtake awareness or concern about medicated servitude, aspirations to be free can quickly wane even if the latent desire remains. Thus disruption of the spectacle is also required to awaken the populace to its actual condition, so that the deceptive and artificial satisfaction of a will-to-freedom can be laid bare. And this effort can also be conserved and institutionalized in *interobjective systems, conditions and artifacts* – in fact it already has been in recent times. This is the character and objectives of various forms of leaderless activism, hacktivism, populism and civil disobedience persisting at the grass roots level into self-organized movements, and fueled by fundamental dissatisfaction with the status quo. In other words, these movements are also *necessary interobjective elements* in achieving a Goldilocks Zone of integral liberty.

It might be helpful at this point to reframe the attenuation or eradication of *all variations of poverty* in more proactive language, where proponents seek to establish and uphold a memplex that includes:

- *Freedom from existential crisis.*
- *Freedom from the tyranny of private property.*
- *Freedom of safety and security through equal treatment under the rule of law and protection from violence and the fear of violence.*
- *Freedom from deceptive manipulation, exploitation and coercion.*



- *Freedom from ignorance and equal access to multidimensional training, skills, knowledge, deep learning & information.*
- *Freedom of health, wellness and well-being through equal access to healing, training and nourishing resources.*
- *Freedom of speech and self-expression through equal access to all arenas of communication and media.*
- *Freedom and equality of travel and relocation.*
- *Freedom and equality of peaceful assembly and association.*
- *Freedom from prejudice, disenfranchisement and social isolation.*
- *Freedom and equality of privacy and participation.*
- *Freedom and equality of spiritual, psychosocial and moral development.*
- *Freedom and equality of opportunity through mutual trust, collective participation, and sharing of common property and communal social capital.*
- *Freedom and equality of “spaciousness” in free time, quiet and solitude.*
- *Freedom and equality of opportunity and support for self-reliance.*



The Role of Integral Lifework

Integral Lifework is my own invention, and its theory and practice are detailed in the book *True Love* (2009). Essentially, it is a method of nourishing and nurturing thirteen dimensions of being, so that the whole person heals, thrives and evolves in integrated harmony. Central to this method is empowering the individual to take responsibility for their own well-being; it is a collaborative, “client-centered” modality in this regard, and deliberately rejects expert-student, doctor-patient, guru-aspirant, externally-dependent dynamics. But the specific nuts and bolts of Integral Lifework practice are not the relevant focus here. What is more crucial to this discussion are the principles of such multidimensional support and its outcomes. In particular, what integral practice of any kind tends to enhance are *supportive structures for moral development*, and in particular a more unitive, love-centric orientation. This becomes particularly critical in the context of transforming an acquisitive, individualistic, competitive, egocentric society enslaved to commercialistic materialism into a compassionate, mutually supportive, horizontally collectivist society that is free from the tyranny of private property. Without the internal and external reinforcement of moral maturity, it is simply easier to revert to a more primitive, lowest-common-denominator modus operandi.

So Integral Lifework – or something like it – will also need to permeate all *interobjective systems, conditions and artifacts* in order for authentic liberty to be fully supported. Whether via childhood education, health and wellness services, personal counseling, worker training, or all of the above, all dimensions of being must be better understood, and better nurtured, by everyone. In a sense, this challenge is similar to that of individuation: if our self-concept and interpersonal relationships are submerged in unquestioned, undifferentiated enmeshment with parents, peers or lovers, and all our decisions and desires are reflexive imitations of these enmeshed relationships and the cultural traditions and expectations that shaped them, we will never fully know ourselves, and never fully be ourselves. We will have unconsciously adopted the habits of emotion, ideation and behavior that



dominate those established dynamics, and pass them on to each generation – also without much thought. The process of individuation, on the other hand, allows us to free our self-concept from codependent impulses, consciously decide who and how we want to be in the world, and then re-engage that world with a healthy self-sufficiency in our emotions, ideas and identity. This is really the bottom rung on the ladder of individual sovereignty, but it is often neglected – or worse, confused with individualism or selfish willfulness. But the point is that analogs of this process need to occur in all dimensions of being – spiritual, physical, intellectual, creative, etc. – so that we become less dependent (less toddlerized and infantilized), and able to operate in higher altitudes of moral function.

To summarize the broadening sweep of these proposals, the immediate *interobjective systems, conditions and artifacts* that would initiate the foundations of liberty and support the subjective experience of individual freedom would include:

1. A “universal social backbone” that supports the foundations of liberty and inherently mitigates *all variations of poverty*.
2. Memplexes embodying freedom-centric values hierarchies and the attenuation or eradication of *all variations of poverty*.
3. Elite think tanks, affiliations, families and other organizations that promote both these memplexes and the formation of a *universal social backbone*, while lobbying other elites to pursue a similar agenda and proactively engaging with activism at all other levels of society.
4. Grass roots, leaderless activism that agitates and educates around these memplexes, advocates for a *universal social backbone*, and disrupts false representations of liberty.



5. Integral Lifework or equivalent multidimensional self-care education, training and resources for all ages – to encourage self-reliance, personal responsibility, and moral maturity.
6. *Participatory mechanisms with built-in accountability* to operationalize democratic will at all levels of government, economy and enterprise.

Over time, these would evolve into broader, pervasive, horizontally collectivist structures, with less and less differentiation between regions, classes, cultures and even localized customizations of political economy.

In order to maximize the Goldilocks Zone of liberty, there will of necessity be an inexorable homogenization of cultural interfaces around the globe, as a byproduct of intensifying interdependence. This is actually already occurring without conscious collectivism – because homogenization (of workers, consumers, culture, etc.) increases efficiencies under globalized capitalism. A central difference in the homogenization process being proposed, however, is that it would be more organic, rhizomatic and self-organizing, percolating up from diversely unique expressions of human community and operating at the boundaries – rather than being imposed from the top down onto every individual as it has been under oligarchic globalization. It would be a voluntary synthesis from a prosocial unitive orientation, rather than compulsory compliance out of fear of poverty, aggression and oppression, or the byproduct of mindlessly destructive greed.

Participatory Mechanisms with Built-In Accountability

Participatory mechanisms with built-in accountability for supporting, enriching, moderating and promoting all other factors in the most egalitarian, diffused and distributed fashion. These could include distributed, daily direct democracy; Open Source initiatives and petitions; regular community meetings and online forums; participatory economics; worker-owned cooperatives; community management of banks and land; as well as civic lotteries for citizen commissions and all levels of polycentric governance networks.

One might think this to be the easiest of topics – for we all know what “democracy” is, right? Well perhaps not, for, as previously alluded to, democracy as a mechanism of public consent has been greatly obscured in its contemporary expressions – much like the obscuration or mediocritization of many other great ideas once they have entered a commercialist mainstream. If the underlying intent of democracy is to operationalize the will of the electorate in civil society – to express that will in the rule of law and the activities of civic institutions – then we seem to have fallen woefully short of that goal at every level of government throughout the modern and postmodern eras. It should be reiterated that, in the U.S. as elsewhere, power has been systematically wrenched away from the people via corporate influence and the agendas of wealthy shareholders.¹⁵ I have written about this elsewhere,¹⁶ as have many others (Klein, Chomsky, Palast, Hedges, Reich et al) in more detail, but there are plentiful examples. Where do the majority of funds for election campaigns come from? Who controls most commercialized mass media? Who actually authors much of the state and federal legislation? Who has the largest number of dedicated lobbyists advocating for their agendas? Who funds the legal challenges to regulatory laws, and strives to place its own former lobbyists and leaders in regulatory oversight positions? Who benefits the most from gargantuan military spending? Who consistently demonstrates the most aggressive and immediate



interest in molding all branches of government to its will? When answering these questions, following the money is remarkably straightforward, and inevitably leads us to the same players: corporations, their cronies and wealthy shareholders.

Now and again a new hope arises in the democratizing power of various technologies. We saw this in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East, when social media played such a significant role in the Arab Spring. And the Internet itself has for a time provided a relatively level playing field for freedom of information access and self-expression. But even the Internet is rapidly conforming to an oligarchic model. Who is tuning search engines and manipulating search results to serve commercial interests above all others? Who is attempting to nullify Net Neutrality and weaken FCC oversight of the Web? Who has turned web browsers into commercial data-gathering engines that commoditize Internet consumers themselves? Again we arrive at the same players as we did before: corporations, their cronies and their wealthy shareholders. It doesn't matter that a progressive, populist President says he will defend Net Neutrality if he appoints a former venture capitalist and cable industry lobbyist to head the FCC.¹⁷ And it doesn't matter if Congressional lawmakers temporarily acquiesce to public pressure regarding Internet freedoms, if they simply wait until a later date to sneak rider language into budget legislation that sabotages Net Neutrality.¹⁸ In the political rhetoric vs. reality equation, corporate agendas remain focused and relentless even as public interest, attention and opinion ebb and flow.

Open Source Governance & Direct Democracy

The Internet actually provides us with a useful model for the participatory nature both of freedom itself and the mechanisms required to sustain it. Consider these helpful equivalencies:



- The digital divide mirrors wealth, class, educational and other divides in that without certain equitable foundations for all, the opportunity to exercise freedom is abundant for some, and non-existent for others. If someone doesn't have a certain kind of technology available to them – or have use of it for the same amount of time, or via the same network access speeds, or with the same level of security from theft of personal data, etc. – *they will not have the same effective facility or utility regarding Internet resources*. They will not have *effective* Internet freedom.
- The Internet is by nature a highly distributed, participatory phenomenon. On the one hand, it has working parts everywhere around the globe which are bound by common operating assumptions, processes, protocols and technologies, mirroring the *interobjective systems, conditions and artifacts* required to sustain freedom; this is equivalent to a backbone of infrastructure and essential services discussed previously. On the other hand, the substance of the Internet is provided in a primarily Open Source fashion by everyone who accesses it, whether by sharing their videos, pictures and written commentary, or by authoring an informational website, or by participating in social media and discussion groups, or coding shareware for download, or otherwise generating freely accessible content.
- A more selective class of Internet user contributes the mechanisms for participation (blogs that allow commentary, survey engines and data, websites that specialize in Q&A, social media platforms, etc.), and, up until recently, the only barrier to engineering such mechanisms has been technical know-how, relatively inexpensive hardware, and access to Open Source platforms and tools. As the Web has evolved, however, this class has become more rarified, with its requirements for participation increasingly demanding in terms of technical sophistication, resources and startup capital. This, too, mirrors the increasing sophistication and complexity of



mechanisms for collective participation in democracy itself. For where once a rural farmer could attend a town meeting to discuss relatively straightforward community concerns (with a handful of peers who likely shared similar experiences), now the participants are exponentially more numerous and diverse, the issues at hand more nuanced, the data influencing a decision more multifaceted, and the technologies required to coordinate, compile and communicate collective decision-making are orders of magnitude more complex. Still, although they are gradually trending towards increased corporate control, the Internet's participatory mechanisms have retained a high degree of distribution, diffusion and egalitarianism.

- A substantial driver for Web-centric interaction has been knowledge diffusion itself. Whether seeking automotive repair advice, consumer opinions about local businesses, expert insights about home improvement products, research on philosophy, or professional education and training, the Internet is brimming with immediately accessible information-rich services and resources.

The ideal expectation of freedom for both the Internet and democracy, it can be argued, is for a universal equivalency in all levels of access, ability to contribute, high quality information, ongoing dialogue, and involvement in the execution and oversight of facilitative mechanisms. At the same time, the parallel also indicates the necessity of certain specialized skillsets to engage in the technical aspects of increasing complexity; technocrats, if you will. In the Open Source community, those who consistently provided the highest quality contributions to various projects over time have become de facto authorities and gatekeepers for those efforts. This has been the quasi-market element of the Open Source revolution. In the same way, as human civilization continues to evolve, there will be always be a need for specialists to both engineer, maintain and safeguard the social backbone of



infrastructure and essential services, and to engineer, maintain and safeguard the mechanisms of democracy itself.

In a State capitalist, market-centric political economy, these roles are routinely perverted by the tectonic pressures to increase profits. In authoritarian, Statist socialism, these roles are relegated to institutional bureaucracy and single-party rule. But in a direct democracy with socialized infrastructure and essential services, where the responsibility for decision-making is pushed down to the community level, there can be a healthy tension between technocrats who are elected to administer participatory mechanisms, and the constituents who vote frequently – again perhaps even in a daily fashion – to shepherd outcomes. Informed by the Open Source model, if those technocrats are additionally held accountable for the quality of their efforts – the justification of merit – through term limits and recall mechanisms, then institutional bureaucracy will itself be moderated through universal, collective participation.

And just as we can restore the Internet itself – and all of its products, services, and information repositories – to the ongoing evolution of Eric Raymond’s “bazaar” model of Open Source development,¹⁹ we can establish equally open, Internet-based democratic processes and dialectic forums that mirror the same principles to generate legislation, manage complex processes, debate the merits of various policies and practices, and make collective decisions about the infrastructure and essential services at all levels. Will this require even more open and sophisticated knowledge sharing and development than currently exists? Absolutely – expertise will no longer be a proprietary domain, and although certain individuals or communities may rise to prominence in specialized areas of discourse and decision-making, this will be the emergent result of proven merit, experience and insight rather than demagoguery, social capital or affluence. Will we need to develop new, secure systems of electronic voting, data collection, moderated public debate, legislation development and enactment? Yes, but we already have the technology to do this. Will there need to be larger, more diverse datasets with more accurate



mining and validation tools, transparently accessible to all of the public? Sure...informed decisions can't be made without accurate, unbiased information that captures many different perspectives. And there will also need to be qualified technocrats – perhaps elected, or selected by civic lottery – to oversee a secure and equitable execution of such an Open Source democracy. But all of this is doable, and in fact there are already Open Source governance experiments along these lines around the globe.²⁰

For comparison, what are some existing mechanisms where direct democracy is actually in play? Where does the will of the people express itself in reliable ways, as moderated and channeled by technocratic processes? Sadly, this is extraordinarily limited. Here are some examples that seem to be enduring, though many still remain flawed:

1. **Juries selected by civic lottery.** Jury members are meant to be randomly selected, remain insulated from the influence of parties interested in the case they are jurying, and provide a consensus opinion about a defendant's guilt or innocence. The court system itself represents the technocratic regulation and facilitation of this process.
2. **Citizen's initiatives.** A ballot measure voted on by the electorate. Here the waters can often become muddied with misinformation campaigns on both sides of a given issue, and by any vagueness of language that could be manipulated in court challenges if the initiative becomes law, so this is an imperfect democratic process at best. However, a democratically elected legislative infrastructure offers technocratic stability for this process.
3. **Referenda.** Similar to the initiative process, but specifically addressing the repeal of existing legislation or recalling an elected official.

4. **Direct polling.** With a large enough sample and a carefully randomized demographic, this can provide meaningful data about the interests and opinions of the electorate, which in turn can influence policy. Here non-profit research institutions or NGOs provide the (technocrat-managed) sampling, compiling and reporting of data.
5. **Direct democracy.** This has had limited application in actual governance, but has had longstanding success in Switzerland where legislative vetos and referenda at the community, canton and federal levels are all enabled by direct democracy. Where 100,000 signatures on a petition will get a formal response from the White House in the U.S., the same number in Switzerland can demand changes in the Swiss constitution through a mandated legislative process and final direct referendum. So there, it is the constitution itself which defines the responsibilities of administrative technocrats elected to the task.

Again, though, in modern State capitalist democracies like the U.S., it is predominantly the will of the wealthy that is captured in the democratic process. Who has the time and resources to be a delegate or alternate to primary conventions? Who has the time, resources and education to promote their agenda at community meetings or in public comment periods? Who can afford to back an initiative or referendum, collecting enough signatures to get them on a ballot? What kind of person generally self-selects to become an elected official, and how do they fund their campaigns? The presumption which has hyperbolically alienated direct democracy from serious consideration is a fear of “the tyranny of the majority” (Adams, Mills, Rand), a concern that individual and minority interests would not be represented or protected by majority rule. This has been an almost exclusively theoretical objection, however, since in all instances where direct democracy has been utilized, no such oppressive tyranny has materialized – or, perhaps more accurately, it has rapidly self-corrected. A potent example of this was the statistical inversion of opposition to gay marriage in California from 2008 to 2012, a



phenomenon echoed in many states around the U.S.; where in 2008 52% of Prop 8 voters were opposed to gay marriage, by 2012 53% of voters polled were in favor of marriage equality,²¹ and this trend of tolerance seems to be continuing.

This is why we need a different approach to direct democracy. Here is what I proposed in *Political Economy and the Unitive Principle*:

As for institutional reforms, why not implement direct democracy at the community level? Using existing technologies, direct democracy could be regularly realized on a vast scale. Imagine a societal expectation that, every day, citizens would vote on any number of decisions with real-world consequences in their community, and do so from the comfort and convenience of their homes; we might call this "daily direct democracy." This could shape the prioritization of infrastructure funding, or zoning for certain business activities, or the number of regular police patrols in local neighborhoods, and so on. Whatever strategic or tactical concerns could easily incorporate direct democratic decision-making would be reviewed each day, and revised and adjusted as citizens observed the impact of their decisions over time. Regarding decisions where specialized knowledge is needed, votes could be organized, solicited and even weighted based on a combination of self-reported interests, expertise and experience. Imagine further that such expectations are tied to certain social privileges - that participation in governance and planning affords benefits that would otherwise be limited or unavailable.

For community issues that require more advanced, rare or specialized knowledge - and perhaps coordination across multiple tiers of government or longer decision-making cycles - community members selected through automated lotteries could participate regularly as part of citizen commissions and community development teams, each with a clearly defined scope of responsibility, interagency liaising, preparatory training, and expectation of wider public input and reporting. Such teams and commissions could work in conjunction with elected officials and established government agencies for a limited period of time, then relinquish their position to the next group of lottery appointees. As alluded to earlier, some percentage of government agency positions would be selected via lottery as well. All of this is intended to mitigate the dangers of entrenched government bureaucracies, special interest influence, and career politicians who serve their own interests above those of their constituents. Here, however, citizen participation is mandatory and regular, demanding a



high baseline level of education and ongoing awareness about community concerns and governance.

But really, shouldn't the participatory process and its mechanisms be decided by the electorate itself? And shouldn't these remain malleable to consensus adjustments in response to new technologies or conditions? It seems obvious that this be the case. And, as I continue in *Political Economy and the Unitive Principle*:

All of these ideas highlight an important consideration: in order to participate effectively in their own governance, community members will require extensive knowledge in the principles of community resource management, economic development and consensus building, as well as a more rigorous continuation of that education moving forward. To this end, the lessons of past successes should inform the proposed dynamics between government agencies, citizen commissions, grass-roots organizations and direct democracy. These would include empowered community organizing, awareness and development efforts, worker/consumer-owned cooperatives that have worked well, and effective partnerships between CDCs, CLTs* and the communities in which they reside. Replicating the checks and balances of the overall political economy, communities would need to integrate the technocratic proficiencies of elected positions, the efficiencies of central planning and coordination, a will of the people that is both informed and compassionate, and many of the risks and benefits of free markets.

Under the same umbrella, the labor and resources that actualize community decision-making would, to whatever degree possible, be sourced from the community itself. How can self-sufficiency in decision-making be fostered if the cost of those decisions isn't borne by the community? As already mentioned, I like the idea of incentivized public funding and participation, where those who contribute the most in terms time, resources or ideas are rewarded with a certain level of benefit from outcomes, such as a certain quality of service, or guaranteed utilization. The valuation of contributions should of course be multidimensional, so that everyone who desires to do so can contribute in some way. But those who refuse to contribute - who consistently demonstrate that they do not value civic participation - should be afforded either fewer benefits, or benefits of lower quality.

* Community Development Corporations and Community Land Trusts



One of the challenges in operationalizing such a vision for liberty and democratic self-governance will continue to be disabusing notions of individual freedom and representative democracy that were envisioned in the simplistic, agrarian, pastoral, homogenous contexts of the past. Resources are not infinite. Private ownership is not rational, and neither its tyranny nor centralized State control is required to avert the tragedy of the commons. Individual sovereignty is not a natural condition but a socially granted one. An evolving majority consensus is not tyrannical – it just takes time to find its own level. Human utility is not the sole determiner of intrinsic value. Wealthy white men are not the only people competent to lead or generate good ideas. Individualism erodes liberty, while horizontal collectivism protects it. Free market capitalism is just as oppressive as feudalism. Socialized infrastructure and essential services need not be feared, and are already part of all of the world's largest mixed economies. Locke and Hobbes made errors in their assessments based on limited data. And so on. These are the counter-tropes we must continue to elevate in collective awareness, supporting them with the wealth of evidence available, gently correcting ignorance over and over again until plain truths penetrate mainstream assumptions about the nature of liberty.

It bears repeating that the success of any form of democracy – and perhaps direct democracy in particular – is profoundly dependent on equal access to education, unbiased information resources, the unrestricted opportunity to vote, and the many other elements of both the “universal social backbone” and the freedoms outlined in the last section. To make informed, skillful decisions about any issue, those who are voting should not need to be persuaded by anyone, but only given access to balanced informational resources, a clearly communicated conception of the issues in play and the remedies being proposed, an explicit expectation that they participate in the democratic process (and a thorough understanding of consequences if they choose not to), and plenty of time to come to an informed decision. In other words, direct democracy demands direct attention and involvement; a pronounced interest and engagement in the democratic process, *because it is so clear where the responsibility for collective self-governance lies:* with



the people themselves. As Stan Lee (rephrasing Voltaire or Hansard) reminded us: “With great power comes great responsibility.” My own rejoinder would be: “When the people know they alone are responsible, they will become responsible.” No one can learn how to wield power until they are fully entrusted with it.

It is important to note that, although technology can provide many streamlined, immediate ways to engage in the political process, the immense value of in-person meetings should not be overlooked. This is where values are affirmed, trust is cemented, and nuanced layers of communication occur; for the dangers of *abstraction* I alluded to regarding representative democracy are also a hazard of virtual interactions. The kinds of face-to-face meetings people choose at the community level – or how they decide to configure in-person conventions or congresses at higher levels of governance – will of necessity have wide variability between communities, cultures and unique styles of political economy. But regular in-the-flesh assemblies have nevertheless always been a critical component of cohesive sociality.

But whether the community meets virtually or in person, engagement is a significant point in terms of political obligation: the expectation of voluntary participation in daily direct democracy creates a clear avenue of acceptance for all intersubjective agreements, a demonstration of reciprocity between collective stability and individual sovereignty, and provides an intimate and fluid feedback mechanism for all political processes. Additionally, it is unnecessary and indeed counterproductive to constrain participatory mechanisms exclusively to public governance, for free enterprise can benefit from democratic reforms as well. And thus we arrive at a second major category of participatory mechanisms: worker-owned cooperatives.



Worker-Owned Cooperatives

Simply stated, this is a successfully demonstrated approach to solving many of the problems in shareholder-centric capitalist enterprise, including the tyranny of private property, the tensions inherent to establishing owner-management and workers as separate classes, and ensuring the safety, well-being and job security of workers, and adequate diffusion of knowledge and training – all of this while still providing opportunities for competition in both non-profit and for-profit environments. Production on nearly every scale can be delivered by networks of worker-owned cooperatives who routinely vote on working conditions, compensation, strategic and tactical directions of the business, internal management structure, customer relationships, integration with local communities and so on. This is basically a “direct democracy for organizations” structure that can be (and has been) implemented in nearly every business sector, from banking to manufacturing to shipping to farming to garbage collection to healthcare. To fully appreciate the nuts and bolts of implementation, the breadth of some real-world experiments, advantages over bureaucratic organizations, and the rationale behind worker-owned cooperatives, I recommend consulting *The Cooperative Workplace* (1989) by Joyce Rothschild and J. Allen Whitt. Here are excerpts from that work that touch on some of the central themes we inevitably revisit when individual and collective wills intersect – in business or anywhere else:

“An organization, of course, cannot be made up of a collection of autonomous wills, each pursuing its own personal ends. Some decisions must be binding on the group. Decisions become authoritative and binding in collectivist organizations to the extent they arise from a process in which all members have the right to full and equal participation.” (p. 51)

“Collectivist organizations generally refuse to legitimate the use of centralized authority or standardized rules to achieve social control. Instead, they rely upon personalistic and moralistic appeals to provide the primary means of control. In addition, the search for a common purpose, a continuing part of the consensus process, is a basis for collective coordination and control.” (p. 54)

"Impersonality is a key feature of the bureaucratic model. Personal emotions are to be prevented from distorting rational judgments. Relationships between people are to be role based, segmental, and instrumental. Collectivist organizations, on the other hand, strive toward the ideal of community. Relationships are to be wholistic, affective, and of value in themselves." (p. 55)

"In sum, where the process of criticism is collectively sanctioned, it may serve a constructive function for the organization. By making the leaders or core members publicly and legitimately subject to members' criticisms, such forums tend to reduce the inequalities of influence and to check personal abuses of power." (p. 87)

"Demystification was defined earlier as the process whereby formerly exclusive, obscure, or esoteric bodies of knowledge are simplified, explicated, and made available to the membership at large. In its essence, demystification is the opposite of specialization and professionalization. Where experts and professionals seek licenses to hoard or at least get paid for their knowledge, collectivists would give it away. Central to their purpose is the breakdown of the division of labor and the pretense of expertise." (p. 114)

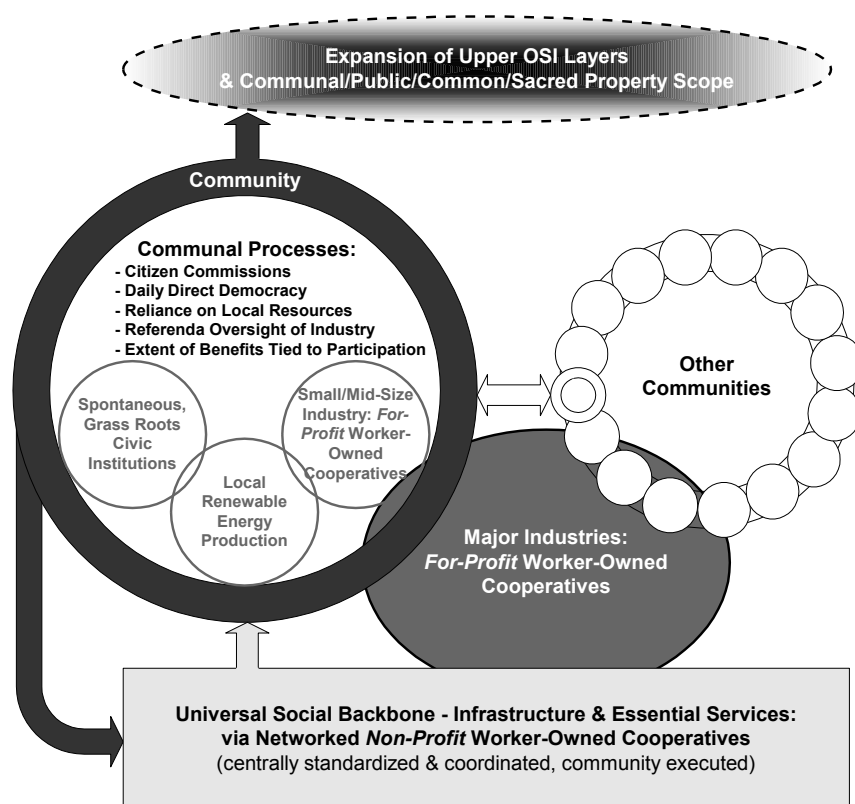
"Worker solidarity, like commitment, is of significance beyond the gains in worker satisfaction and morale that it may bring. One research team has found in its study of cooperatives in developing countries that high solidarity goes with various measures of economic success, just as low solidarity goes with economic failure (Abell and Mahoney, 1981, p.14). This team posits that cooperatives rely on their solidarity and commitment advantages to achieve their economic performance; if these are lacking, the result is more diseconomies than in a conventional enterprise. As is apparent from the organizational features outlined in Chapter 3, a collective orientation depends on mutual trust. Internal conflict is especially disruptive precisely because of the consensual basis and personal relations that characterize these groups. Thus, compared with conventional firms, higher levels of worker commitment and solidarity are often observed in cooperative enterprises – but by the same token, they are also more necessary." (p. 165)

"In light of the available evidence, we are led to provisionally conclude that worker ownership and democratic management often can be turned into a labor productivity and profitability advantage. But this economic advantage is precarious in cases where mechanisms are not established to give workers more voice in company affairs." (p. 167)



Over the following decades, additional research has confirmed many of Rothschild and Whitt's observations as being highly predictive of enduring worker-owned cooperatives around the world.²² That research indicates that employee-owned cooperatives often outperform non-employee-owned competitors, tend to demonstrate more resilience over time, and provide greater worker satisfaction and sense of purpose – as long as there is ongoing democratic engagement, sufficient internal education and training, and a culture of self-awareness and constructive mutual evaluation. Competition with other enterprises can of course be stimulative as well. In many ways, the successful characteristics of these cooperatives parallel the design principles of Elinor Ostrom's common pool resource management – and indeed what seems to work in most collectivist approaches.

In *Political Economy and the Unitive Principle*, I advocate for two layers of worker-owned cooperatives. On the one hand, there would be a non-profit layer of producers and service providers that compete with each other to provide all the features of the “universal social backbone.” This idea was inspired in part by non-profit health insurers in Switzerland who compete with each other for healthcare customers. On the other hand, there would be a for-profit layer of worker-owned cooperatives participating in a more traditional exchange economy for goods and services above and beyond the universal social backbone. Over time, as fiat currency, banking systems and perhaps even the exchange economy itself are replaced with more egalitarian, horizontally collectivist, distributed and participatory mechanisms, then “for-profit” and “non-profit” designations will likely evaporate. Economies could be negotiated and coordinated entirely through Open Source manifestations of direct democracy, with the means of production shifting back to communities and people's homes through advanced automation. Even the concepts of “worker-ownership” and ownership shares in communal resources or enterprises could dissipate, migrating through phases of social credit accounting into an as-yet-unconceived gift economy. As a helpful exercise, we can imagine various configurations and innovations to enable this transition, but the reality will need to respond to evolving conditions in rhizomatic ways.



Initially, however, the two proposed layers of enterprise could encompass a majority of business entities – though clearly flexibility should be given to very small businesses, and perhaps even to a limited number of industry-disruptive innovators and outliers who feel (correctly or incorrectly) that collective decision-making will inhibit their unique creativity, work styles and tastes. Remembering Ostrom’s observations, we should expect adjustment to unique variables and local conditions for any proposals. At the same time, we can be fairly confident that other approaches to reforming shareholder-centric enterprises, such as benefit corporations or B Lab certified corporations, will ultimately fall short of adequately moderating the corrosive ethos of hierarchical property ownership – the problems are too endemic. As I write in *Political Economy and the Unitive Principle*:



“There have been proposals to remold U.S.-style capitalism into a more just and compassionate system. Efforts like "conscious capitalism" and its offspring, B Corporations, are the latest incarnation of an enduring American optimism that corporate culture can be changed for the better. In a similar vein, "natural capitalism" attempts to introduce true-cost accounting for natural resources, thereby recognizing externalities usually ignored by free markets, with the hope of lessening both waste and negative impacts on those resources. And of course there are an endless series of management training and organizational development consultants who will help re-brand a company into a worker-friendly, environmentally conscious, civically constructive enterprise. None of these efforts, however, have changed the market-centric assignments of property *ownership* in the U.S. system.”

Intellectual property would follow a similar path to collective ownership as we inevitably move towards an Open Source orientation, achieving maximum knowledge diffusion, contribution and collaboration. Remember that, for those whose level of moral maturity requires personal benefit to incentivize innovation, socially productive efforts are still rewarded via the *social credit system*. But there would be no longer be the massive concentrations of wealth resulting from exclusive ownership by individuals or organizations, so that patents, trademarks and copyrights would tend to be collectively held and have relatively brief legal durations – perhaps ten years at most.

In addition to free enterprise, we can now consider another participatory ingredient alluded to in the graphic above: spontaneous, grass roots civic organizations.

Spontaneous, Grass Roots Civic Organizations

A convenient way to categorize this phenomenon is “community organizing,” and plentiful resources are available on the topic. All we are really concerned with here is the civic function such organizing serves in the context of authentic liberty, and some useful participatory models for these grass roots institutions. As Michael



Brown describes them in his superbly practical guide, *Building Powerful Community Organizations* (2006, p.1-2):

“Community is one of those things that is hard to define, but you know it when you are in it. It is a feeling that you are not alone, that you are part of something greater than yourself – but yet, even when you are in it, you are still yourself. It does not swallow you up; rather, it builds you up. It is not all for you and you are not all for it. In a community there are people around you whom you like, although you probably do not like them all equally. The people of the community are there for you when you need them and you will be there for them when they need you.

Community organizations come in all shapes, sizes, and varieties. Every community organization holds all the complexities and all the hopes, dreams, and visions of the people who join it. Community organizations may look different but they all have at least two things in common:

1. Community organizations strive to develop a sense of community among their members.
2. Community organizations organize people to do what they cannot do by themselves....

The exact alchemy that transforms a group of individuals into a community organization is elusive, but it is clear that the process requires intuition, a good sense of timing, a gift for strategy and for relationships, and healthy doses of boldness, leadership, persistence, perseverance, passion, commitment, and courage. One person usually does not have all those qualities; that is why it takes a group. Add to this list: *mistakes*. You will make mistakes along the way, and that is to be expected. You can learn from them.”

At first Brown’s definitions may seem simplistic and even vague, but he is hinting at the very nature of human society – a complex organism of dynamic interdependence that relies on multiple centers of intelligence and multiple avenues of cooperation. He is also speaking to the spirit of experimentation and inherent variability that community organizations represent, as well as *the necessity to learn from doing*. Thankfully he offers plentiful examples of how all of this has played out over his thirty-year involvement, and relentlessly promotes what he calls the Iron Rule of



Organizing: “never do for people what they can do for themselves;” here even leadership itself is about developing other leaders, rather than taking control. Again we can feel the resonance with other collective proposals, with the democratization of all processes, with Elinor Ostrom’s design principles, with the inclusive and egalitarian attitudes and practices, and so on. These ideas – that is, what works in the real world – are all cut from the same cloth. And, in harmony with the unitive principle, regarding recruiting Brown advises (p. 133):

“You want people who care about the issue, but not *only* about the issue. You are looking not simply for people who have a personal self-interest in the issues you are working on, but people whose self-interest is deeply motivated, not narrowly defined. What are their stories? What is their motivation? Beware of people who say that they are *not* at all personally motivated, who are doing it only to help others. They are not likely to last long in your organization. Also beware of people who seem to care *only* for themselves (to get *their* raise, to lower *their* water bill, to get rid of the abandoned cars on *their* street). You *definitely want* people who care deeply about the issue your group is working on. But you also want those who think about others as well as themselves.”

This cross-pollination is so evident that we can clearly integrate the insights Brown, Ostrom and Rothschild, Whitt and the many others who have written about horizontal collectivism to inform all of our participatory mechanisms, while never forgetting the ultimate aim of championing the *subjective felt experience of liberty* for all.

Polycentric Governance Networks & The Urban Landscape

The final piece in participatory mechanisms will be polycentric governance. Just as we cannot operate as isolated, autonomous wills within our community, each community, organization, business and local government cannot operate as an autonomous entity without reference to everything and everyone else around it. The level of intimacy and fluidity of communication between these entities will



determine their democratic efficacy and realization of authentic freedom. From *Political Economy and the Unitive Principle*:

“In many ways, the specific details of community-centric visions and processes matter less than the importance of engagement and dialogue both within a community, between communities, and between each community and the regional, national and global apparatuses of economy and government. The encouragement that such interactions become more intimate rather than less is paramount. One of the most destructive disconnects of the modern age is the perpetuation of the isolated individual or family that has no relationship with their community, its government and its resources, other than through paying a fee for a service, a tax for infrastructure that is taken for granted, or a vote to empower a stranger they have never met who will make decisions for them. This distancing of cause-and-effect into non-relating, discompassionate, reflexive and often apathetic exchanges is a principle destroyer of social cohesion. To reverse this trend, we need to reconnect with each other.”

We must expand polycentric governance to include all stakeholders in the democratic process, at all altitudes of governance and interdependency. Community organizations, direct democracy, citizens commissions, civic government, NGOs, all scales of worker-owned enterprise – all of these and more will need to have a place at the table when generating consensus around policies and decisions that affect their interests. But the core values of polycentric governance are the same as the other collective efforts, emphasizing self-governance and self-organization at the most localized level possible for a given concern (i.e. the principle of *subsidiarity*), once again trusting communities – or networks of communities, as the case may be – to work out solutions for themselves and between each other, *rather than officials doing everything for them*. Thus, just as we emphasize horizontal collectivism at the community level, the ongoing discussions and agreements for larger and larger circles of inclusion are engaged primarily through horizontal participatory mechanisms, rather than through vertical arrangements; solutions and responsibilities percolate up from collective involvement, rather than down from representative authority.



And now we can return briefly to Aristotle's concept of the city state – or, perhaps more accurately – the largest circumference of organic self-organization that seems to naturally occur in the modern world. Having lived in or near several large cities in the U.S. and abroad, and having travelled to many more, what seems clear is that as cities grow, they maintain distinct interior boundaries – at least in Western cultures. What inevitably occurs is a division according to six distinct themes: commercial districts, historic or invented micro-cultures, wealth (i.e. desirable real estate), homogenous populations tied to certain services or industries, tourist destination areas, and high-turnover rental areas. These themes influence each other, are often fluid and of course overlap, but what is particularly interesting is that humans still gravitate towards distinctly bounded communities – indeed we seem to long for it. Even in densely populated regions, there will be a unique flavor to different city districts, condominium developments, neighborhoods, commercial strips, apartment buildings and so forth that correspond to these themes. Even in sprawling suburbs, there will be areas that are more desirable than others because of the particular breed of community there. This is often intangible, and may in some cases be connected to the quality of services available nearby, the landscape, access to preferred resources (distance from employers, shopping areas, recreation, restaurants, etc.), but it is nevertheless clear to anyone who has lived in different areas of the same city that there are completely different flavors of community available in different neighborhoods, and that those neighborhoods are both geographically contained, and numerically capped in terms of population.

What moderates this organic process of cultural organization are six powerful influences: communications technology, transportation technology, population growth and density, employment locations, energy and goods production, and natural resources. Communications technology allows us to order things online or over the phone for home delivery and connect with friends and work remotely. Transportation technology allows us travel quickly over long distances to reach an employer, activity or service. Increases in population and density amplify competition for all resources and the pressures on vertical production and



distribution. Employment locations are generally not located in the most desirable residential areas, and can often involve long-distance communication and travel. Energy and goods production tend to be highly centralized away from urban centers – up to hundreds of miles away in the case of electricity and produce, and thousands of miles away in the case of fossil fuels and consumer goods. And, similarly, natural resources (arable land, potable water) can be hundreds or thousands of miles away as well.

Echoing Schumacher's observations in *Small Is Beautiful*, this “6x6” formula of themes and influences has produced an ever-exaggerating tension between increasingly hierarchical global economic activity and the natural size and geographic centrality of human community. And as cities expand and merge with neighboring communities, while dependencies on - and volumes of – remote food, energy and goods production continue to grow, this tension will only be compounded, creating a deepening chasm between what industrial, technological and economic drivers promote, and the social structures and relations we most crave in order to feel free and thrive.

There are many ways to remedy this tension, and some of them have already been attempted. One is to use the globalizing technology itself to create virtual communities of shared values and interest, and Internet-based social media has made enormous strides in this regard. Perhaps, in the not too distant future, virtual reality interfaces will enhance this experience as well. However, considering the wealth and importance of nonverbal, non-symbolic communication that humans have developed to navigate social dynamics, it is unlikely that this avenue of remedy will be entirely successful; a virtual hug (or LOL, emoticon, etc.) will never be quite as enriching or communicative as the real thing, no matter how sophisticated VR sensory technology becomes. Another possibility is to utilize strong Artificial Intelligence to manage complex systems, in anticipation of a singularity that either biologically amplifies human capacities or subjugates humanity to a much deeper technology dependence; but this is likely quite far off, and/or not nearly the panacea



it purports to be. Another avenue of remedy, also technology-dependent, is to relocate as many of the globalizing influences back to the community level.

Imagine that electricity is sourced from community solar installations and other local renewables; a majority of community market produce is grown in local community gardens; advanced 3D printers located in community centers, along with local artisans and flexible manufacturing networks, provide a majority of goods the community needs; small businesses likewise integrated into the community provide a majority of desired services; and employment is executed either from home, or via business facilitates integrated into the community. Many of these approaches are already well-developed, experimentally implemented, or well on their way to becoming a reality. So it is easily conceivable that the 6x6 tension could be rapidly reversed – in a matter of only a few years – *if* our longstanding obsession with private property are relaxed at the same time that these emerging solutions become commonplace.

If this were to occur, then pushing as much political decision-making down to the community level as possible would have the greatest impact in terms of self-governance as well. And, to reiterate, for decisions of municipal, regional, national or global scope, the concepts of nested polycentric interaction could be applied. The idea of nested linkages, derived from Ostrom's work (principle 8 in the table referenced in "Possession Without Ownership" above), could apply to vertical and horizontal relationships – both between communities, and between communities and institutions with larger scope.²³ But the emphasis would remain on community and inter-community consensus, rather than technocratic expertise, with direct democracy playing a dominant role.

Will all of this require the same kind of knowledge-diffusion that allows worker-owned cooperatives to flourish? Absolutely; we see the cross-pollination of collectivist examples at work here as well. The co-management concept between all of these governance mechanisms is really no different in its collective spirit than



consensus at the community level itself, rearranging its connections for each issue being addressed to generate solutions both tactically and strategically. So this is how we arrive at the term “polycentric governance networks,” because the configuration of each polycentric decision tree would be completely different, depending on who the stakeholders are for a given concern or objective.

Objective Metrics

Objective metrics employed at frequent and regular intervals for all of these factors to assess their ongoing efficacy in generating the greatest authentic liberty, for the greatest number, for the greatest duration.

Regarding *objective metrics*, what is our aim? How can we measure the actual “freedom” alluded to in any of the factors we’ve already enumerated? How can we calculate and adjust our metrics to formulate proposals and managing mechanisms for ourselves individually, for our communities, for our civic institutions, for business organizations and so on? If our proposal is to define a Goldilocks Zone of integral liberty, then we will require specific ways to measure an optimal range of function for all conceivable areas. What follow are ostensibly a first draft of those metrics, with the ready acknowledgment that there is much room for tailoring and refinement.

Using the criteria we’ve developed so far, one arrangement could be as follows: We would assess the relief of the poverties that interfere with liberty as our primary indicators, using the operationalization of four primary drives across all four key factors (*subjective experience, intersubjective agreements, interobjective conditions, and participatory mechanisms*). In keeping with the Goldilocks analogy, our measurements will need to indicate three zones of differentiation: either *deficient*, meaning that the poverty is not being relieved in the course of *existing, expressing, effecting* and *adapting*; *within the optimal range*, meaning that integral liberty is being achieved as the poverty is relieved; or *excessive*, meaning that mechanisms to overcome that poverty have become paternalistic or are significantly interfering with other liberties. Clearly these would need to be developed to whatever gradation or granularity is required, but as our starting point we could simply use a range of *-4 to +4*; that is, each of the primary drives contributing *-1, 0 or +1* to each key factor, with *0* representing the optimal range. In this way the ongoing tension

between individual sovereignty and collective agreement is marginally represented, so that not only the predilections and wants of Goldilocks are in play, but also those of the family of bears. As I mentioned previously, there is inevitably fuzziness around such semantic containers, and copious interpenetration and interdependency between them – for example, what might be considered “internal” vs. “external” or “individual” vs. “collective” – but we can still define our initial metrics generally, with an eye towards future refinement.

Table 1: Representing Integral Liberty

Freedom, Equality & Opportunity ----- or Poverty?	Subjective Experience	Intersubjective Agreements	Interobjective Systems & Conditions	Participatory Mechanisms
Common Property & Access				
Justice - Laws				
Justice - Courts				
Justice - Enforcement				
Economic Freedom - Opportunity to Trade				
Economic Freedom - Employment				
Economic Freedom - Disposable Income				
Economic Freedom - Goods Access				
Education - Critical Thinking				
Education - Skills Training				
Education - Diverse Understanding				
Knowledge & Information - Open Media				
Knowledge & Information - Independent Verification				
Assembly & Association				
Health & Wellness				
Trust & Social Capital				
Self-Expression				
Multidimensional Perception				
Travel & Relocation				
Freedom from Prejudice				
Privacy				
Time-Space-Solitude				
Emotional Intelligence				
Moral Development				
Spirituality				
Compassion				
Perspective-Vision				
Self-Reliance				



The assertion here is that, in order for authentic free will to exist for all, individuals, communities, free enterprise and all level of governance must be operating within an optimal range for a majority of these metrics, and doing so consistently. Which means that, given the natural cycles of human behavior, we need to be measuring these variables pretty frequently to track and correct individual, collective and institutional trends. Perhaps using the mechanisms of daily direct democracy itself, and reporting results on a weekly or monthly basis, we can begin to tune our individual and collective awareness and efforts into continuous improvement. We can, in essence, continually assess and enhance our own freedom. For if we do not have such data available, how can we judge whether our liberty is real or illusive? And, of equal importance, how will we successfully challenge some new spectacle that persuades us we are free even as it seeks to enslave us?

The Pilot Principle

In keeping with the *precautionary principle*, I wanted to briefly summarize the importance of incremental, limited-scope testing of new ideas, while using the aforementioned metrics to validate progressive efficacy. This is so critical for any change management – and so easily forgotten in ideological tug-of-wars. There is no reason any reasonable new idea cannot be part of ongoing experimentation, especially if the experiment can begin at the community level and grow from there based on its success. In a way, incorporation of competing outlier ideas into separate pilots should probably become the standard for all collective public policy considerations; why not make small, incremental mistakes and learn from them, or, contrastingly, small models that demonstrate proof of concept for broader implementations? In the same vein, examples of successful models from around the globe – be it gun laws in Australia, or direct democracy in Switzerland, or the principles of common pool resource management Elinor Ostrom observed in Guatemala, Turkey, Kenya and Nepal – should inform any new proposals as well. In these instances, much of the piloting work has already been accomplished, so why



reinvent the wheel? As someone who – in an earlier career – designed and managed technology changes across large organizations, it has always struck me as profoundly misguided to institute change without relying on the pilot principle.

Assessing Conventional Proposals & Ideologies with the Principles of Integral Liberty

Initially, I had conceived of creating charts that plotted existing systems and ideals according to the variables, principles and metrics discussed in this paper. Then I realized just how sizeable an undertaking it would be even to assess “authentic liberty” vs. “illusions of freedom” along one axis and find objective data to support that analysis. This simply exceeds my available time and resources at the moment. Nevertheless, I believe this is possible using scientific methods. What I suspect to be true is that systems and ideologies that support horizontal cooperation, collaboration and knowledge diffusion will be the winners. It seems obvious that the more people there are, the more cultural diversity intersects, and the less space and resources are available for all, the greater the tendency toward hierarchical arrangements and hyperspecialization. I think that is how we arrived where we are today, and why we need to engineer a change.

The traditional, simplistic conceptions of private property, negative liberty and labor appropriation work well in regions with lots of space, lots of natural resources, and people who share (on the whole) the same ethnicity, knowledge-base and cultural makeup. In these instances, “equality” becomes a de facto assumption, conditioned on homogeneity. It is perhaps too obvious to state that the musings of Locke, Hobbes, Smith and other influential writers in past centuries were grounded in a pre-industrial agrarian mindset, and so resonate strongly with those who view their own situation and immediate environment through a similar experiential filter – or who romanticize about such times. But with the inevitable pressures of urbanization and globalization creating the 6x6 tensions alluded to earlier, a “don’t



tread on me” mentality just won’t work anymore. Thus we require a new, more rigorous paradigm for what “verifiable free will” actually means for us today, and I hope this paper can contribute to that discussion. All we need to move forward is the collective will to escape the inertia of the status quo and its lugubrious autocracy, to embrace a more integral view of authentic liberty, and the moral maturity to commit to a necessary evolution.



Answering the Critiques of Collectivism

Questions always seem to arise around collectivist proposals, and so I want to nip some in the bud if I can with a brief FAQ that responds to issues I have been asked about when exchanging ideas with others:

1. **Is integral liberty Marxist?** Not really, though it does address many of Marx's central concerns. The closest ideological approximation is *libertarian socialism*, as influenced by participism, anarcho-syndicalism, eco-socialism and deep ecology – but it is also not completely or exclusively adherent to any of these.
2. **Is integral liberty anarchistic?** Not pure anarchism, no – and certainly not along the lines of *individualist* styles of anarchism. However, it does de-emphasize central government to a large degree.
3. **Do you consider individualism immoral?** Not at all – just morally immature. It is also an increasingly unsustainable orientation at a time when technology allows individuals to have tremendous, disproportionate impacts on others and on their surroundings, and in a complex interdependent world which is, ultimately, a closed system with limited resources.
4. **What about past failures of collectivism?** Past failures do exist, and IMO the cause can nearly always be attributed to either a lack of participatory processes, a lack of sufficient moral development in the participants, or to the experiments being imbedded in a dominant State capitalist system that isolated the group, antagonized cohesion, and constantly hammered away at collectivist values with commercialistic memes.
5. **What about people who don't want to conform to social expectations, or share resources, or be morally mature?** They will have a place in any community that practices integral liberty – it will just be a less prestigious place than in a capitalist system where such behavior is rewarded. There may even be communities that form around more egoic, I/Me/Mine levels of development, and as long as they don't interfere with the liberties of other communities, they will be largely left alone. However, there will still need to be standards of



integration (commerce, transportation, communication, energy, law, etc.) at the boundaries of such communities.

6. **Is integral liberty nonviolent?** Yes, in the sense of “doing no harm or the least harm.” It would advocate the use of non-lethal force for community policing, only defensive force for self-preservation in larger conflicts, and nonviolent civil disobedience as a means of individual and collective action.
7. **Can capitalism be retained in integral liberty?** No. The tyranny of private property will always increasingly interfere with liberty. Competition, exchange economies, fiat currencies, investment banking and other capitalist elements may remain throughout a potentially lengthy transition period, but even these will likely attenuate over time as societal priorities and individual incentives shift into prosocial practices and systems informed by the *unitive principle*.
8. **Could anyone become wealthy within this system?** Of course. The ability to accumulate *social credits* would be unrestricted. A person could, conceivably, accumulate enough credits to take extended vacations and travel the world, or go back to school to study something new or learn new skills, or spend a year just writing poetry or meditating or whatever. They just would have “earned” this wealth of credits through exemplary citizenship and compassionate action – rather than through exploitation, sociopathology, deceptive manipulation, or moral turpitude. There also would be shares of communal property and worker-owned cooperatives that are potentially transferrable or convertible.
9. **Do you foresee any problems in reifying integral liberty proposals?**
Certainly. There will be tremendous resistance from those who celebrate greed and personal wealth-accumulation, who value willfully self-referential autonomy, who are unable to relinquish their own toddlerhood, or who are simply afraid. There is also the matter of status quo inertia. Change is hard.
10. **What is the single most important factor in implementation?** Encouraging intellectual, psychosocial, spiritual and moral development through Integral Lifework or other integral practice. Without such development, integral liberty could create more dissonance than harmony; without love-consciousness percolating through communal, collectivist engagements, it will likely fail.



Appendix A: Strata of Moral Development

Self-Identification	Strata of Moral Valuation
<p style="text-align: center;">Unitive Infinite</p> <p>Self Equates both Being and Non-Being (or Non-Identification, “No Self”) and Compassionate Integration of All That Is, Including Previous Self-Identifications</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Applied Nonduality</p> <p>This is an expression of mystical, nondual consciousness as a supremely unfettered existence where intuitions of universal freedom are fully realized. There is a certain irony that the autonomy one's ego so craved in earlier strata is now readily available through the absence of ego. The lack of a distinct sense of self in some ways eradicates any sort of identification at all -so non-being is equivalent to being, and self is equivalent to both nothingness and previous conceptions of "the All." Here inexhaustible loving kindness is conclusively harmonized through advanced forms of discernment. An enduring all-inclusive love-consciousness integrates all previous moral orientations, current intentions and actions into a carefree -but nevertheless carefully balanced -flow; a flow into what might be described as "ultimate purpose." Previous orientations are then viewed not as right or wrong, but as a spectrum of imperfect expressions of that ultimate purpose. In this final letting go of self-identification, all nourishment is love, all love is nourishment, and all values hierarchies are subordinated to skillfully compassionate affection. At the same time, this realization and any other constructs become just that: constructs, inventions of the mind. Up until now, the main concern of moral valuation has been the orientation of self-to-self, self-to-other, self-to-community, self-to-environment, self-to-planet, self-to-humanity, self-to-nothingness, self-to-All, etc. In other words, previous values hierarchies tended to be preoccupied with the context of the self. In this stratum, that context is no longer relevant, because there is no self, no no-self, and not even a concept of self or no-self. Along the same lines, the past/present/future construction of time dissolves into insignificance.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Formless Infinite</p> <p>Self Equates Non-Being, Non-Identification, “No Self”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Unknowing Emptiness</p> <p>This mode of being has been the backdrop for all previous strata, and has woven itself into those strata at various points in the form of “letting go” of previous constructs and patterns of being – we just haven’t fully comprehended the scope of that letting go until now. This is the stratum first of radical deconstruction, then chaotic revolution, a tearing asunder of the veil of certainty, challenging of self-concept and of the nature of all relationships and interdependencies, and fluid revision of the context and content of all moral strata and systems. Once again, the theme of acquiescence has always been part of previous transitions and evolutions, but here we fully inhabit that space and allow it to permeate our consciousness and interactions. This is the gap where faith and doubt collide, where rational and nonrational reconcile, where manifest and unmanifest infuse each other; this is the crucible where <i>agape</i> and emptiness forge a new alloy. As expressed in actions and intentions, this stratum frequently feels like either fragmenting disruption on the one hand, or perceived paralysis on the other: either a grenade of Light that exposes underlying stucturelessness, or the quiescent twilight of action-without-action. Ultimately, however, this is where multidialectical tensions can resolve in neutral stillness, where negation becomes the midwife of creation, and where detachment creates a fertile ground for more skillful love-consciousness. In terms of time-space, “now” still predominates, but its context dilates to encompass every point in the continuum previously considered past, present or future; the now becomes <i>potential</i> even as it ceases “becoming” anything at all.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Shared Spirit</p> <p>Identification With All That Is as Defined by Shared Spiritual Understanding</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Spiritual Universality</p> <p>Through persistent and intimate connection with an absolute, universal inclusiveness of being, moral function is defined by whatever most skillfully facilitates “the good of All” (that is, the greatest good, for the greatest number, for the greatest duration). “The good of All,” in turn, is an evolving intuition, a successive unfolding of mystical awareness in concert with dialectical cognition and neutrality of personal will. However, it tends to remain more of a felt sense than an exclusively rational construct. Skillfulness can still</p>



	<p>be refined through empirical experimentation and observation, but it is always subjected to a filter of intensified and unconditional compassion -a felt sense as well. Identification with the All is fluid and seamless, and moral thought and action flowing from this identification are also fluid and seamless. That is not to say that this stratum can't occasionally be interrupted by regressions to previous strata within one or more dimensions of being (usually as a reaction to overwhelming or stressful situations), but the contrast and incongruity of those regressions is strikingly obvious. Past, present and future become a continuum where "now" is less fixed; the experience of time itself is more relative and process-oriented. Nevertheless, "now" remains the primary reference for that process.</p>
<p>All-Being Identification with Progressively Broader Inclusions of Consciousness & Being Together with All Supportive Systems</p>	<p>Transpersonal Holism</p> <p>This stratum is marked by an increasing flexibility of moral orientation. For example, the realization that more than one values hierarchy can be valid, that someone can operate within multiple values hierarchies simultaneously, or that seemingly opposing values hierarchies can synthesize a new, higher order moral orientation. This intersubjective moral ambiguity is then navigated through the discernment of intentional, strategic outcomes that benefit the largest majority possible. Definition of what constitutes "the largest majority possible" likewise changes and evolves, but is strongly informed by transpersonal perceptions and experiences. In turn, identification with this transpersonal connectedness subordinates other identifications, so that, for example, experiencing a shared ground of being is indistinguishable from compassionate affection for all beings, and compassionate affection for all beings is indistinguishable from attenuation of individual ego. The relevant time-space for this stratum becomes contextual; the relevance of past, present and future shifts with current priorities, and the cycles and patterns of time begin to give way to a continuum.</p>
<p>Earth Life Identification with Every Living System on Earth – All Its Individual Components & Supportive Environments</p>	<p>World-Centric</p> <p>At this point there is a greater appreciation and acceptance of ecologies that facilitate, transcend and include human society. These ecologies may contain biological, metaphysical, quantum or other systems-oriented constructs, with the feature that these systems are vast, complex and interdependent. Here moral function is inspired by individual and collective commitment to understanding and supporting those systems in order to support all life. Personal identification with this broader, ecological consciousness expands humanity-centric compassion and concern into world-centric compassion and concern. Values hierarchies now begin to be viewed as a primary form of nourishment, from which all other nourishment is derived. Time dilates and slows a bit here, tending to be viewed more as cycles and patterns than a linear progression.</p>
<p>Human Society Identification with All People Everywhere</p>	<p>Principled Rationalism</p> <p>Moral function is now defined by a rationally defined set of reasoned moral principles, principles with the unifying objective of benefiting all of humanity. For anyone operating in this stratum, empirical validation of moral efficacy is of particularly compelling interest; what really works should be embraced, and what doesn't should be discarded. There is also an additional form of individuation here, where identification with previous communities (communities whose values and goals had previously been facilitated and integrated) begins to fade, and is replaced with increasing identification with, and compassion for, all human beings. Social divisions are discarded in favor of equal status. The future can now become an all-consuming fixation that drives more and more decisions, the past becomes an advising reference, and the current moment a fleeting absorption. As a result, time tends to both constrict and accelerate in this stratum, remaining linear in experience and conception.</p>
<p>Affinitive Community Identification with All People Who Share the Same</p>	<p>Cooperative Communalism</p> <p>Here a communal role and collective responsibility is firmly accepted and established as part of moral function, and community is defined by shared values and experiences,</p>



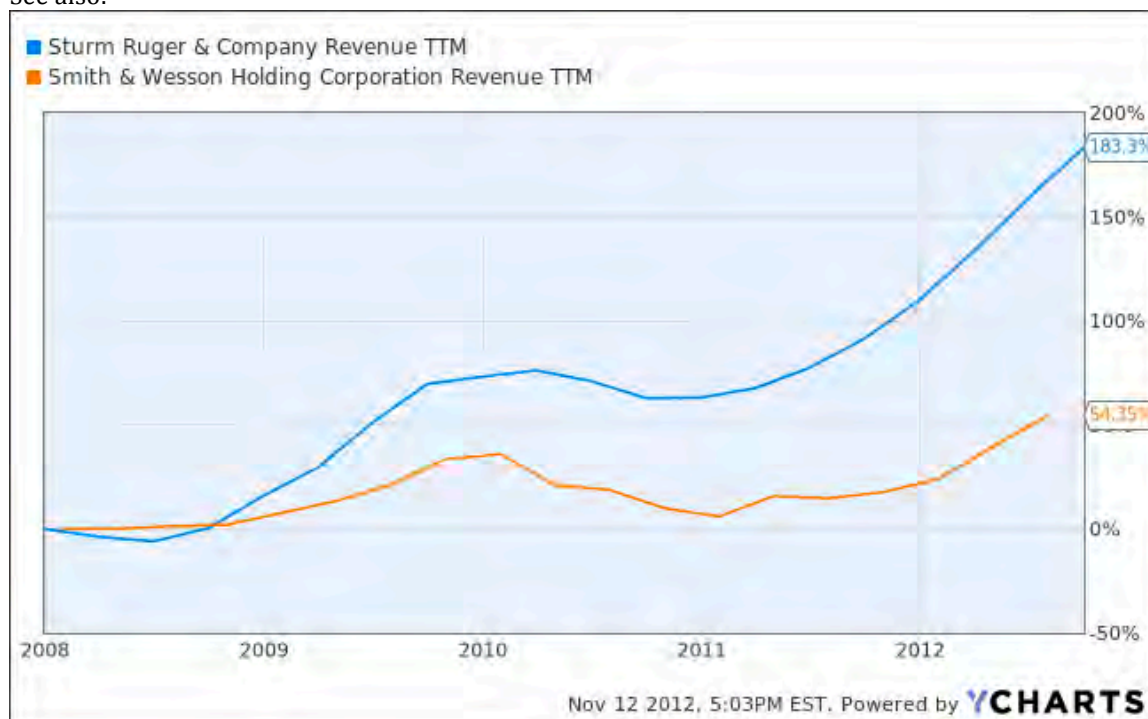
Values or Experience	rather than just shared benefits or just laws. The necessity of collaborative contribution to human welfare is understood, and the desire to compete for personal advantage fades away. A community's shared values are appreciated, integrated and supported in order to further that community's goals and collective nourishment, but without the suppression or sacrificing of personal values and identity that were common in earlier tribalism. Thus distinctions of class, caste, and social position tend to attenuate. This stratum also tends to invite preoccupation with the future, sometimes even beyond one's personal future, because we are charting a course through increased complexity. Time is experienced and conceived of as episodic.
Beneficial Community Identification with All People Who Benefit Each Other in Some Way	Competitive Communalism Moral function is strongly influenced by personal acceptance of the importance of participating in a mutually beneficial and lawfully just community, while still retaining individual uniqueness. However, this initial expansion into a communal moral orientation usually orbits around competition. Competition with others for personal positional power and influence in the community; competition with other moral orientations, asserting the relevance of one's own views and priorities; nonconformance with, and continual challenging of, a community's established values hierarchy; and competition for other forms of social capital. In this stratum the future gains more importance as one strategizes navigation of these competitions. The past also regains its teaching role, with emphasis on both failures and successes to inform current strategies.
Committed Greater Self Acceptance of the Identify of "Self" as Larger Than Associations with Group(s) or Ideas	Contributive Individualism Now more fully individuated from the primary tribe and its social constraints, one continues to be committed to one's own well-being, freedom, wholeness and access to more subtle, nuanced and complex nourishment resources. Moral function is increasingly defined by efforts that appear "good" or helpful to others, as framed by conscience, the context-of-the-moment and interpersonal relationships. In this sense, moral relativism is derived from one's own experiences and interactions, and tends to be maintained and defended within this self-referential absorption. The present is still paramount here. This stratum is part of an individuation process from the tribe and the tribe's values hierarchy. Moral orientation may lapse into previous strata, but is otherwise centered around a sense of obligation to one's own uniqueness, freedom, well-being and wholeness. As a result, one is open to more complex nourishment that was not available within egoic or tribal orientations. Probably as a component of emancipation from tribal expectations, there tends to be minimal concern about the impact of one's individuation process on others. In this stratum, the present once again gains preeminence; the past is being left behind, and the future matters less than assertiveness in the now.
Tentative Greater Self Identification with a Possible "Self" Larger Than Associations with Group(s) or Ideas	Opportunistic Individualism This stratum is part of an individuation process from the tribe and the tribe's values hierarchy. Moral orientation may lapse into previous strata, but is otherwise centered around a sense of obligation to one's own uniqueness, freedom, well-being and wholeness. As a result, one is open to more complex nourishment that was not available within egoic or tribal orientations. Probably as a component of emancipation from tribal expectations, there tends to be minimal concern about the impact of one's individuation process on others. In this stratum, the present once again gains preeminence; the past is being left behind, and the future matters less than assertiveness in the now.

<p>Secure Tribal Position</p> <p>Identification with “My People”</p>	<p>Defensive Tribalism</p> <p>Here the social order and internal rules of our primary social group(s) are championed as correct and proper both within the tribe (regulation) and to the outside world (proselytization). Competition with and subjugation of -other individuals or groups outside of the tribe (or one's class, caste or social position) becomes more pronounced. Thus moral function is defined by rigid definitions and legalistic rules (law & order, right & wrong, black & white) that justify and secure personal standing within the tribe, as well as the tribe's standing within a given environment. Now, because one's tribal position is secure, the past again dominates. Past authorities, traditions, insights and experiences infuse the present legalistic frame with self-righteous justification.</p>
<p>Insecure Tribal Position</p> <p>Identification with “The People I Want to be My People”</p>	<p>Tribal Acceptance</p> <p>Conformance with social expectations, and approval of one's primary social group(s), governs moral function here. What is “right” or “wrong” is defined by what increases or attenuates social capital and standing within the group(s). The acknowledged link between personal survival and tribal acceptance expands self-centeredness to tribe-centeredness, but otherwise operates similarly to lower moral strata.</p> <p>In this stratum, one's "tribe" tends to be fairly immediate, and fairly small -a family, team, group of peers, gang, etc. Now the relevant timeframe shifts back into the immediate future, where status and influence will either be lost or realized; the past may still be instructive, but what waits around the next bend in the road is what preoccupies.</p>
<p>Ego Identity</p> <p>Identification with Ego</p>	<p>Self-Protective Egoism</p> <p>Moral function is governed by acquisitive, manipulative, consumptive or hedonistic patterns that accumulate and defend personal gains (i.e. secure nourishment sources) in order to insulate the ego from risks and loss. This self-centeredness may be masked by primitive adaptive personas that navigate basic reciprocity, but is generally indifferent to other people except for the ability of others to satisfy personal demands. Now the past can actually become more important than the present, because the past is where wrongs were suffered and gains realized. Reflections on the present and future, on the other hand, tend to be inhabited by fear of risk and loss.</p>
<p>Formative Identity</p> <p>Developing Ego and Ego-Identity</p>	<p>Self-Assertive Egoism</p> <p>The aggressive utilization of basic tools to satisfy one's own wants and whims, usually without regard to the impact on others, is an overwhelming moral imperative here. In most situations, this imperative is only moderated by fear of "being caught" and the personal embarrassment, punishment or loss of personal nourishment that may follow. The relevant timeframe for fulfilling one's desires expands a little here, so that gratification can be delayed until the near-future. However, the past is largely irrelevant, except as a reminder of negative consequences to be avoided.</p>
<p>Unformed Identity</p>	<p>Egoless Raw Need</p> <p>Naïve, helpless state in which volition is centered around unrestrained basic nourishment in every moment, but where the mechanisms of needs fulfillment are unknown, unskilled or otherwise inaccessible. In this stratum, the scope of one's relevant time-space for this needs fulfillment is almost always the immediate, everpresent <i>now</i>.</p>

Footnotes

- ¹ *True Love: Integral Lifework Theory & Practice*, T.Collins Logan, (2009, p.22)
- ² *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation* (Batoche Books, 1999, p. 22), available at <http://socserv2.mcmaster.ca/~econ/ugcm/3ll3/green/obligation.pdf>
- ³ "Arts Education in America" (National Endowment for the Arts, 2011) <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/2008-SPPA-ArtsLearning.pdf>
- ⁴ "Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract," Thomas Hill Green, 1881.
- ⁵ See the MRI research of Gregory Burns regarding canine emotional responses. <http://www.ccnl.emory.edu/greg/>
- ⁶ "What Endowment Effect? A Public Good Experiment" 2003 [http://www.uta.edu/faculty/mikeward/What%20Endowment%20Effect%20\(Oct%2003\).pdf](http://www.uta.edu/faculty/mikeward/What%20Endowment%20Effect%20(Oct%2003).pdf)
- ⁷ "More Than Half of Mass Shooters Used Assault Weapons and High-Capacity Magazines" 1982-2012 <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/02/assault-weapons-high-capacity-magazines-mass-shootings-feinstein>.
- ⁸ "Assault Weapons Sales Boom Fuels Gun Industry Profits" http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/19/assault-weapon-sales-military-style_n_2333584.html

See also:





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- ⁹ “Big Banks Paid Billions in Bonuses Amid Wall St. Crisis”
www.nytimes.com/2009/07/31/business/31pay.html.
- ¹⁰ Vienna Institute of International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC) Video:
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